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Monterey, CA; Naval Postgraduate School

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# **NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL**

**MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA**

## **THESIS**

### **ASSESSMENT AND SELECTION PROCESS FOR THE BULGARIAN SPECIAL FORCES**

by

Petar Georgiev Vlahov

December 2019

Thesis Advisor:  
Second Reader:

Kalev I. Sepp  
Michael Richardson

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**ASSESSMENT AND SELECTION PROCESS FOR THE  
BULGARIAN SPECIAL FORCES**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

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(IRREGULAR WARFARE)**

from the

**NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL  
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## **ABSTRACT**

Currently, Bulgarian Special Operations Forces (BUSOF) has no effective practice in the process of Special Forces Assessment and Selection (SFAS) of its personnel. Additionally, no investigation has been performed to assess the link between the admission process and the quality of the BUSOF operators. This thesis confirms the urgent need for a custom-tailored SFAS for Bulgarian Joint Special Operations Command (BJSOCOM) by describing the Special Forces missions and the history of SFAS, and analyzing the current admission process for the BUSOF. The study first examines the experience of the United States and other NATO SOF in developing and conducting their respective SFAS processes, to help in defining the profile of prospective Special Forces personnel and developing a new SFAS process for the BJSOCOM. In addition to the literature review, the study includes results from responses to a questionnaire, provided in advance of interviews with senior U.S. and other NATO SOF representatives at the United States Special Operational Command (USSOCOM). The study concludes that there are significant differences in the admission processes—including screening and selection standards—of Bulgarian SOF and the rest of the NATO SOF units. Based on the findings of the research, the study recommends that the BJSOCOM should focus on improving the process of recruitment, screening, and assessment and selection of future SF operators.



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## LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AJP	Allied Joint Publication
BAF	Bulgarian Armed Forces
BJSOCOM	Bulgarian Joint Special Operations Command
BLFCOM	Bulgarian Land Forces Command
BUSOF	Bulgarian Special Operations Forces
CAT	Computerized Adaptive Testing
CQB	Close Quarters Battle
DA	Direct Action
DUI	Driving under Influence
EOD	Explosive Ordnance Disposal
GROM	“Grupa Reagowania Operacyjno-Manewrowego”
JTAC	Joint Terminal Attack Controller
KSK	“Kommando Spezialkräfte”
LDAFRB	Law on Defense and Armed Forces of the Republic of Bulgaria
MA	Military Assistance
MJK	“Marinejegerkommandoen”
MOS	Military Occupational Specialty
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCO	Non-commissioned Officer
NORNAVSOC	Norwegian Naval Special Operations Commandos
NRF	NATO Response Force
ODA	Operational Detachment Alpha
OSS	Office of Strategic Services
SFAS	Special Forces Assessment and Selection
SFQC	Special Forces Qualification Course
SOF	Special Operations Forces
SOTG	Special Operations Task Group
SR	Special Reconnaissance

TTP	Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures
USSOCOM	United States Special Operational Command

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## I. INTRODUCTION

You can get everything else wrong, but if you get the people right, you will be all right. Whereas you can get everything else right, but if you get the people wrong, you are going to be in trouble.

— Brigadier General William Bowers, USMC

### A. BACKGROUND

Wars have been conducted by societies around the globe from pre-history to the present, and due to the development of humanity, wars have become more complex by nature. This has increased the need for highly skilled, elite warriors for executing those special tasks that often determine the final outcome of the conflict. Nowadays, humanity is living in a world characterized by increased globalization and a high-tech, dynamic, connected, multi-dimensional environment, where the enemies are able to blend in among the target population and threats are often unpredictable. Terrorism and the war on terror are challenging. There are no clear warzones; there are no clearly distinct warriors or combatants, and often the conflict is unclear. In fact, much of the action is taking place in the “grey zone” below the threshold of conflict. “We have seen a tendency toward blurring the lines between the states of war and peace. Wars are no longer declared....”<sup>1</sup> In most cases, regular conventional units are unprepared to fight this type of threat and could have difficulties coping with them. This type of warfare requires unconventional approaches from military units consisting of personnel capable of unorthodox thinking—“thinking outside the box”—and who have superb combat effectiveness. In the “toolbox,” the Special Operations Forces (SOF) are the most suitable resource due to their strategic utility to address these grey zone threats. Those elite units are distinguished by some of the following characteristics: they are relatively small in number, specially selected, specially trained and equipped with the latest military technologies, rapidly deployable, and capable of autonomous operations with a shortened chain of command. The purpose of the SOF has

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<sup>1</sup> Valery Gerasimov, “Tsennost’ nauki v predvidenii” [The value of science in prediction], *Voenno-promyshlennyyi kuryer*, no. 8, February 27, 2013, <http://vpk-news.ru/print/articles/14632>.



always been to resolve critical situations, as well as to answer this new type of threat. At the same time, they are prepared to be most effectively utilized on the modern warfare stage, capable of executing direct and indirect missions to achieve operational and strategic outcomes.

The Bulgarian Special Forces started with the creation of the Parachute Group in the beginning of World War II. Initially, the personnel for the Parachute Group were selected from the whole Bulgarian military and subsequently sent for training in Germany. Within the current Bulgarian Special Operations Forces (BUSOF), a few of the officers and non-commissioned officers (NCO) completed either the U.S. Army Special Forces Qualification Course (SFQC) at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, or the Portuguese Army SFQC at their home base of Lamego, Portugal. The experience gained during those SFQCs in Fort Bragg is of great advantage, both directly to the person who passed the process and indirectly to the whole BUSOF. On one hand, when an officer or an NCO undergoes the SFQC they test and prove their capabilities as well as gain experience and knowledge. On the other hand, those personal benefits—the knowledge and experience—will be used and passed on, to a certain extent, to the rest of the BUSOF personnel.

## **B. PROBLEM STATEMENT**

The need for Special Forces Assessment and Selection (SFAS) and SFQC has long been considered by all levels of Bulgarian Special Forces (SF) leadership. It was not until recently, however, the organization was authorized to conduct these courses after the establishment of the Bulgarian Joint Special Operations Command (BJSOCOM). Currently, the BUSOF do not have a specialized assessment and selection process, developed for the purpose of finding the right personnel—the most reliable and capable, who possess superior qualities, necessary for building expertise for executing Special Forces missions. Some of the reasons for the late establishment of a SFAS process are the following: BUSOF were under the Bulgarian Land Forces Command (BLFCOM), which distributed the financial resources in a way that did not favor the BUSOF. In the same manner, the BLFCOM restricted the decision-making process in many ways, including how the ranks are filled. Another obstacle has been and continues to be the clumsy

legislation of the Bulgarian authorities for changing the status quo or making an exception for using different selection criteria, which would include applying higher standards than those for the conventional military forces, to find the right personnel for BUSOF.

### **C. RESEARCH QUESTION**

How can the Bulgarian Joint Special Operations Command draw from the experience of U.S. and other NATO Army Special Forces in conducting the SFAS process during Phase I of the SFQC, to develop a new the assessment and selection process for finding the right personnel?

Can the development and application of higher standards for recruits for the BJSOCOM increase the number of high-quality candidates?

### **D. PURPOSE**

The SOF units are not only one of those elite “forces of choice” during a war, particularly in the “grey zone” below the threshold of conflict, but also they are widely utilized in peacetime. The ability and the success of the Special Forces to counter challenging situations begin with and depend on the type and the quality of the people serving there. The complexity of missions assigned to Special Forces requires selecting the “right” personnel to be a high priority, applying higher standards during the recruitment process.

The purpose of this study is to examine the experience of the U.S. and other NATO Special Operations Forces units in the process of SFAS and to provide suggestions and recommendations for improvement of the current selection process for the future BUSOF personnel. The topic of the study “Assessment and Selection Process for the Bulgarian Special Forces” is relevant as well as it is of great importance for the Bulgarian SOF for several of reasons.

First, the study must define the basic principles and the profile of the prospective Special Forces personnel in order to develop a new SFAS process for BUSOF, using the experience of the U.S. and other NATO SOF units during Phase I of the SFQC. The purpose of the new process is to increase the combat effectiveness and interoperability of

the BUSOF by providing highly suitable officers, NCOs, and soldiers for the Special Forces operational units of the Bulgarian Joint Special Operation Command.

Second, the recently established BJSOCOM of the Bulgarian SOF has the need for developing a new SFAS process, as part of finding the most suitable candidates for creating a pool of high-quality personnel for the future force. This is not only one of the requirements, but also one of the main goals of the Command of the unit to fill the ranks with new highly-qualified Special Forces service members.

Lastly, Bulgaria is part of NATO, and Bulgarian SOF continuously maintain the combat readiness of at least one Special Operations Task Group (SOTG) for the NATO Response Forces (NRF) Special Operations Component Command. For this reason, BJSOCOM has the responsibility to provide carefully selected operational personnel, using stringent application standards and selection requirements suitable for professional Special Forces training. This will enable BJSOCOM to become reliable world-class Special Forces warriors for the needs of NATO's collective security.

This thesis is relevant for the BJSOCOM, and could be used as the first step in the process of creating and legalizing a new, effective SFAS process. The current admission process for Bulgarian Special Forces shows that the attrition rate is close to zero percent if the candidates exceed the standard requirements, specified in the application documents, and meet the medical and psychological standards. The current conditions for entering the Bulgarian SOF allow people with big differences in their abilities—intellectual, mental, and physical, with different motivation and emotional stability—to be accepted into the unit. These facts, on one hand, cannot guarantee high-quality personnel and, on another hand, lead to unequal distribution of duties and responsibilities, usually loading the more qualified. There are some fixed standards that the selectees have to meet during the first phase of their training; however, these standards are not high enough for the elite SOF units. Moreover, there are no legal mechanisms for removing officers or enlisted personnel if someone does not perform at the desired level or does not make the most of his or her capabilities. Looking back at the history and tracking the process of selecting SOF personnel from World War II to the present, it is evident that the SOF could not be effective if it does not include the highest standards to qualify for service in both the elite units and

for Special Forces units. Recently, along with creating the BJSOCOM, BUSOF prepared a new vision for personnel selection. After the establishment of the BJSOCOM, with the political support of the Government and the Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Bulgaria, the selection process will be improved and include an emphasis on the selection of high-quality personnel.

## **E. SCOPE OF RESEARCH**

The scope of the study includes identifying the most important principles and guidelines for finding the right candidates, as well as the profile for the prospective officers and soldiers that the Bulgarian Joint Special Operations Command has to look for during the development of a new SFAS process. Additionally, the research answers whether the admission process currently used in BUSOF meets these principles. For that purpose, the study examines how different SOF units conduct their assessment and selection processes in order to fill the ranks of their formations. The SOF units studied in this thesis are all NATO members, including the United States, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Norway, Netherlands, Poland, and Romania. Those countries are not randomly chosen. Each meets three basic criteria. First, for some of them, there are written unclassified sources in the English language; second, there are senior SOF representatives of these countries at the United States Special Operational Command (USSOCOM) who were willing to share data about how they run their SFAS processes; and third, all SOF units used in the research are from European countries (with the exception of the United States), and all are NATO members, having similar regulating documents and values.

This study does not include and evaluate selection processes for SOF units, even though they have quality personnel with proven combat experience, from countries such as France, Spain, and Russia, for the following reasons: 1) there are no available official and reliable “live sources”; 2) there is no written reliable information, or it is classified; and 3) all documents are written in a language different from English or Bulgarian. Furthermore, although some of them have SOF traditions and rich combat experience, including SFAS examples from countries from Asia and Africa is not appropriate for comparison with the Bulgarian SOF for several simple reasons. First and the most

important reason, is the cultural differences between Bulgaria and those countries, which determine the differences in the system of values and requirements for military candidates. Second, there are no available “live sources” or reliable written information for the countries excluded from the study. Last but not least, there are no Bulgarian allies among these countries, and they are not members of the NATO Alliance.

## **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **A. OVERVIEW**

This literature review examines information about the process of Special Forces' assessment and selection. The purpose is to try to find the answer to the research question, which asks how the BJSOCOM can develop a new the assessment and selection process for finding the right personnel, by drawing on the experience of U.S. and other NATO SOF units in conducting SFAS process during Phase I of the SFQC as an example. Moreover, along with comparing the process of recruiting, assessment, and selection among U.S. and European-based NATO SOF units, as well as Bulgarian Special Forces, the study is looking for best practices that could be applied in a new assessment and selection process in the Bulgarian Special Forces, for finding individuals who are suited for the requirements and specifications of the modern Special Forces.

The literature about the specific requirements and standards for conducting the assessment and selection process in Special Forces is limited for security reasons. This is understandable, and makes it difficult to find many sources that reveal the full process and especially the criteria used for evaluation and the characteristics that potential candidates need to possess to be accepted by the Special Forces community. The reason to use the rich U.S. experience, as a primary example in the reviewed literature, is not only because the publicly available literature is about assessment and selection in the U.S. SOF but also because of the similarities in the missions and the partnership between the U.S Army Special Forces and the Bulgarian Special Forces. Another reason to look at the publications about the U.S. example is that the U.S. SOF has a rich tradition and high level of expertise for the process of SFAS.

The review of published materials collected is separated into three general sections: (1) historic lessons describing the creation of the first U.S. and Bulgarian Special Forces units in the 1940s; (2) current lessons showing the process of creation, development, and employment of modern SOF in the recent days; and (3) official documents—the leading

documents that define the Allied Special Operations activities and the documents that concern how the ranks are filled in the BUSOF.

## **B. HISTORIC LESSONS**

With the data collected in “Creation and Development of the Bulgarian Special Operations Forces,” author Colonel Rosen Gerov traces the history and the development of Bulgarian SOF from the beginning of World War II to the present. He describes the need for creating the Parachute Group (the predecessor of the Bulgarian SOF), the employment of that group during World War II, and its transformation over the years. The decision to create the Parachute Group was taken 1941 and conditioned by political, economic, and military factors. In the spring of 1942, the recruitment and selection of the first candidates for the newly established Parachute Group started. After the initial assessment and selection, including medical, psychological, physical fitness, and hyperbaric chamber tests, the approved candidates were sent for training in Germany. Using the German model for its organization, as well as German equipment and armament, the Parachute Group was the best equipped unit in the Bulgarian Army. After his detailed account of the creation of what would be the prototype of today’s Bulgarian Special Forces, Col. Gerov only briefly describes the unit’s subsequent development. This information includes mostly organizational transformations, but it is not clear what criteria were used for assessment and selection of the personnel in the years following World War II.<sup>2</sup>

The basis of the United States Special Operations Forces undoubtedly is set by the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) Operational Groups. The most relevant and distinguished source revealing the guidelines for finding the right OSS personnel is *Selection of Personnel for Clandestine Operations: Assessment of Men* by the U.S. OSS. As described, the organization was looking for “men who could shoulder responsibility and use initiative with common sense. Simply because a man has intelligence does not

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<sup>2</sup> Rosen Gerov, Възникване и развитие на специалните сили в Българската армия, [Creation and development of the Bulgarian Special Operations Forces], (Bulgarian Defence Coledge “Georgi Stoykov Rakovski” Sofia, 2019), 7–8.

qualify him for this type of work.”<sup>3</sup> Additionally, the selecting staff came up with a list of the major requirements for a candidate, which are: Motivation for Assignment; Energy and Initiative; Effective Intelligence; Emotional Stability; Social Relations; Leadership; Security; Physical Ability; Observing and Reporting; and Propaganda Skills.<sup>4</sup> Most of the requirements described by the author serve as a basis and are still relevant for the process of assessment and selection of personnel for the modern SOF.

The history of U.S. SFAS is discussed in several issues of the U.S. *Special Warfare* journals. In “Case Studies in Selection and Assessment: The First Special Service Force (FSSF), Merrill’s Marauders and the OSS OGs,” Dr. Kenn Finlayson and Dr. Charles Briscoe consider three unit case studies in selection and assessment: the FSSF, the 5307th Composite Unit, and the OSS Operational Groups. According to Finlayson and Briscoe the FSSF was one of the most highly trained and successful special operations units during World War II. The key to the unit’s success was high standards for the personal qualities of the volunteers. Merrill’s Marauders become famous, not because of any special selection process, but due to the rigorous training in India, including physical endurance exercises, map reading and land-navigation, and extensive weapons training. The opposite was the case for the OSS OGs. The OSS OG members were among the most carefully and thoroughly assessed and selected personnel during World War II. The most distinctive characteristic of their selection was the comprehensive psychological evaluation of each candidate. Finlayson and Briscoe conclude that: “Each of the three units used a process of assessment and selection that stressed technical and tactical skills related to the unit’s mission.”<sup>5</sup> In the articles “A History of Assessment and Selection” by MAJ John Faunce and “A Short History of SF Assessment and Selection” by MAJ Sam Young, the authors briefly summarize the history and methodology of the selection process from the OSS to the more recent SFAS in looking for specific attributes in the candidates. Faunce notes the

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<sup>3</sup> Donald Fiske, *Selection of Personnel for Clandestine Operations: Assessment of Men* (Walnut Creek, CA: Aegean Park Press 1993), 13.

<sup>4</sup> Fiske, 13.

<sup>5</sup> Kenn Finlayson and C.H. Briscoe, “Case Studies in Selection and Assessment: The First Special Service Force, Merrill’s Marauders and the OSS OGs,” *Special Warfare* 13, no. 4 (Fall 2000): 30.



similarities between the processes for selecting personnel from the 1940s to the present. These articles reveal that, in the development of a new assessment and selection process, it will be helpful to look back historically at lessons learned by previous special units.

Another excellent example about the historical significance and the appreciation of the modern Special Forces is given by Tom Clancy with the help of General Carl Stiner (ret.) in *Shadow Warriors*. In order to demonstrate the capabilities of the U.S. Special Forces warriors, the authors trace their path from the OSS in World War II to their participation in other conflicts to the present, and consider the future role of the Special Forces. The book describes the early selection process and the qualities needed for the OSS OG members and their type of operations. “The Pioneers,” as Tom Clancy calls the predecessors of the modern SOF, were carefully selected and trained for the job that few others could handle. The essence of the requirements with which the OSS volunteer must comply was wrapped in the words of an OSS welcoming senior officer: “We are looking for individual heroes.... We want mature officers who can train foreign resistance troops, quickly and efficiently, then lead them aggressively.”<sup>6</sup> Additionally, the book represents the hardship the co-author Carl Stiner endured during his selection process back in the day, and looks into the future by mentioning the structure of today’s SFQC. Clancy demonstrates his appreciation of U.S. Army SOF in *Special Forces: a Guided Tour of U.S. Army Special Forces*, explaining what SOF are, how they are created, their training and missions. Clancy wrote: “Just what are ‘Special Operations Forces’ and what they do? The short answer is this: They are specially selected, specially trained, specially equipped, and given special missions and support.”<sup>7</sup>

### C. CURRENT LESSONS

Within the recent context, the U.S. *Special Warfare* journal describes details of the U.S. SFQC in “The Special Forces Q-Course” by MAJ James Fricke. The author sheds

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<sup>6</sup> Tom Clancy, Carl Stiner, and Tony Koltz, *Shadow Warriors* (G.P. Putnam’s Sons, New York 2002), 38.

<sup>7</sup> Tom Clancy and John Grisham, *Special Forces: A Guided Tour of U.S. Army Special Forces* (New York: Berkley Books, 2001), 3.

light on the structure and the duration of the Q-course; in the same journal, MAJ James Velky in “SFAS” dives more deeply into the assessment and selection process. MAJ Velky, mentioning the history of SFAS, identifies the objectives of the recent requirements for the candidates. He does a good job of describing basic traits that SFAS looks for in the candidates and the testing methods for defining the profile of the candidates. These are useful lessons learned and could serve as groundwork for development of a strategy for creating of the new assessment and selection process for the BUSOF.

Dick Couch and Linda Robinson are among the most credible authors who write for and about the U.S. SOF community. In addition to understanding the process of the making of the modern Special Forces soldier, in *Chosen Soldier: The Making of Special Forces Warrior*, author Dick Couch describes first hand his experience during U.S. SFQS at Camp Mackall in North Carolina. SEAL qualified, with multiple publications about U.S. SOF, he writes “*Chosen Soldier* is the story of how these special warriors are recruited, selected, and trained. *Chosen Soldier* is also the story the making of heroes.”<sup>8</sup> The book briefly goes through the history, the missions, and the organization of the Special Forces. The importance of the recruitment process, preparation, and selection shows the process of looking for and finding the right kind of people for effective and successful training for the unique tasks of the U.S. Special Forces. As the writer points out, “So they’re [U.S. Special Forces] looking for men who can think and improvise—men who can operate independently with little or no help, or direction, from a conventional command structure or logistic support.”<sup>9</sup> “Along with physical and professional assessment evolutions, there’s the mental and psychological screening.”<sup>10</sup> The high standards during the process of finding and training the future Green Berets determines high quality, in both the Special Forces personnel and the mission accomplished. The content of the book makes it absolutely relevant for the needs of the Bulgarian Special Forces, which can use similar principles for recruitment, selection, and training during SFQC. Linda Robinson is also

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<sup>8</sup> Dick Couch, *Chosen Soldier: The Making of Special Forces Warrior* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2007), 6.

<sup>9</sup> Couch, 45.

<sup>10</sup> Couch, 132.

closely familiar with the U.S. SOF brotherhood. She writes about the history and the present, as well as the training and the missions of the U.S. Army SOF. Although in her book, *Masters of Chaos: the Secret History of the Special Forces*, Robinson writes to a great extent about major operations through the years, the chapter “Earning the Green Beret” describes the difficulties a “would-be Special Forces soldier” has to go through. Robinson writes “Men are tested alone and in groups for endurance, stress management and ingenuity.”<sup>11</sup> The author vividly outlines the process of assessment and selection during the SFQC, but does not give details about the principles and methods for finding the right personnel, which are essential for this study.

For broad, overall understanding of the nature and essence of the U.S. Special Forces, Thomas Adams writes *U.S. Special Operation Forces in Action: the Challenge of Unconventional Warfare*. Although he does not describe the SFAS process in detail, Adams gives knowledge about what U.S. Special Forces really are, supporting his arguments with examples of their participation in different conflicts. In a like manner, in *United States Special Operations Forces* David Tucker and Christopher Lamb show their point of view about Special Operations elite units that the United States is counting on. Besides the historical information, SOF roles and missions, the book describes how they are selected and trained. Tucker and Lamb write, “SF selection proper begins with a program called a Special Forces Assessment and Selection (SFAS) course. SFAS is a test of a candidate’s ability to withstand mental and physical stress.”<sup>12</sup> “The authors highlight the physical and mental challenges that trainees must overcome and examine the important role that organizational culture plays in their recruitment, selection, and training.”<sup>13</sup>

In the book *Leadership: The Warrior’s Art*, edited by military historian Christopher Koleda, there is a chapter “The Renaissance Force: Selecting Soldiers and Forging Teams

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<sup>11</sup> Linda Robinson, *Masters of Chaos: The Secret History of the Special Forces*, 1st ed. (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), 15.

<sup>12</sup> David Tucker and Christopher Lamb, *United States Special Operations Forces* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 58.

<sup>13</sup> Stephen M. Grenier, David Tucker, and Christopher J. Lamb. *United States Special Operations Forces*,” *Journal of Conflict Studies* 28 (April 2008). <https://journals.lib.unb.ca/index.php/JCS/article/view/11253>.

for Special Operations” in which the authors Richard Potter and Kalev Sepp discuss the need for elite warriors, the conditions for creating a Special Forces warrior and teams, acknowledging the importance of the specifics of the culture, and sustaining it over time. All this is seen through the prism of leadership, one of the many qualities necessary for Special Forces warriors. As the authors write, “Creating and sustaining such a force [U.S. Special Forces] requires the development of mastery and maturity in its leaders and soldiers.”<sup>14</sup>

In addition to helping to understand what the modern U.S. and other NATO Special Forces are, in *The Mammoth Book of Inside the Elite Forces: Training, Equipment and Endeavors of British and American Elite Units*, author Nigel Cawthorne gives a detailed description of U.S. SOF and British Special Air Service (SAS). Besides the general information, the author pays attention to the selection of the personnel and the specifics of their training. Cawthorne confirms the importance of quality personnel in the beginning of the book, writing: “It takes a special kind of person to join the Special Forces and those who pass the stringent entrance requirements are subjected to the most rigorous training.”<sup>15</sup> In a like manner, but more generally, in *Elite Warriors: the Special Forces of the United States and Its Allies* by George Sullivan, the specifics of the U.S. and some of the best NATO SOF are shown. The author stresses the importance of the specific qualities that the Special Forces warriors must possess. “Undoubtedly, there are many thousands of soldiers who would like to become Green Berets, but only a small handful are able to qualify for the Q course. Army says you must be ‘mature and motivated, and open and humble,’ . . . You must be able to display ‘independence and authority.’ You must be ‘innovative and a team player.’”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Christopher D. Kolenda, ed., *Leadership: The Warrior's Art* (Carlisle, PA: Army War College Foundation Press, 2001), 343.

<sup>15</sup> Nigel Cawthorne, *The Mammoth Book of Inside the Elite Forces: Training, Equipment and Endeavors of British and American Elite Units* (London: Robinson, 2008), 1.

<sup>16</sup> George Sullivan, *Elite Warriors: The Special Forces of the United States and Its Allies* (New York, NY: Facts on File, 1995), 5–6.

## **D. OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS**

The Bulgarian Special Operations Forces are part of NATO Allied Special Operations Forces, where the leading document is Allied Joint Publication (AJP)—3.5, chapter 2. The document defines the range of activities that Allied SOF conduct and with which they must comply. Nonetheless, the AJP does not direct the procedures for how each country finds its SOF personnel, what is required during the recruitment process, and how the selected personnel have to be trained to able to execute those activities.

The three leading official documents that define the conditions and criteria for the candidates to apply for the Bulgarian SOF are: 1) the Law on Defense and Armed Forces of the Republic of Bulgaria; 2) the Minister of Defense Order concerning the “Announcement of vacancies of the 68 Special Forces Brigade for the admission of military service for graduates from civilian universities and high schools in the country and/or abroad and determining the terms and procedure for conducting a contest”; and 3) the 68th Special Forces Brigade COM “Announcement for conducting a contest for soldier’s postpositions for military service in 68th Special Forces Brigade.” These documents define all current requirements that candidates must meet in order to enter the service in BUSOF.

## **E. CONCLUSION**

The reviewed literature tracks the history of the creation and the development of the SOF and the process of assessment and selection in U.S. and Bulgarian SOF, from the beginning of their existence in World War II, until recent days. In most sources the authors look back to the history when describing the process of finding the right individuals for SOF, which indicates that the lessons learned from early OSS assessment and selection are still relevant today. The literature review also provides the necessary foundation for further analysis and adapting the Special Forces operator’s profile required for today’s challenging reality. The existing unclassified literature, which is mostly about the U.S. SOF, is separated into three general groups: 1) historic lessons and 2) current lessons—though in most of the sources the history of U.S. Special Forces is mentioned to a certain extent—and 3) publicly available official documents. The important information provided shapes the overall picture of the assessment and selection process. The study is looking for the

missing information—the criteria and standards necessary for finding high quality personnel for the BUSOF, which must be met by the candidates. This is essential for the purpose of establishing adequate guidelines and a useful process to develop a purposeful Special Forces assessment and selection process, and the profile of the candidates that the Bulgarian SOF must look for during the process. The importance comes from the fact that currently the quality of the candidates for the Bulgarian SOF does not comply with the requirements for modern SOF and the challenges of the present dynamic security environment.

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### **III. PRINCIPAL TASKS OF SPECIAL FORCES AND HISTORY OF SFAS**

This chapter provides information about the significance of Special Forces tasks and how that relates to the importance of the personnel assessment and selection process for finding the most suitable people to execute Special Forces missions. Additionally, the chapter describes the history of SFAS processes, looking at the early experience with selecting personnel for the Bulgarian Parachute Group during WWII and the background of the U.S. Army SOF selection process.

#### **A. ALLIED SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES PRINCIPAL TASKS**

The attributes required of the Special Forces personnel of each country is not an end in itself. Rather, it is one of the most important means, closely connected to executing all missions for which Special Forces units are trained. By nature and with the specific qualities they possess, SOF are the most effective in conducting economy-of-force operations, generating strategic advantages disproportionate to the resources they present.<sup>17</sup> SOF are tasked with a range of missions different from those of conventional military units, so the personnel who are assigned to execute those missions need to have qualities and skill-sets different from other military personnel, without diminishing the importance of conventional military units. A brief description and awareness of the importance of the missions NATO SOF execute would confirm the need for SOF units to identify high-quality personnel.

The standards for NATO SOF principal missions and tasks are defined in Allied Joint Publication (AJP) 3.5 edition A, version #1, from December 2013. According to Allied Joint Doctrine for Special Operations, “SOF offer the Alliance an additional and unique capability to achieve objectives and perform tasks to create strategic—and/or operational—level effects that no other forces in NATO are able to conduct. If, however,

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<sup>17</sup> Daniel G. Burwell “Special Forces Assessment and Selection Program Development for Force XXI,” Master’s thesis, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Leavenworth, KS, 1999. <http://handle.dtic.mil/100.2/ADA367697.35>.



they perform tasks that may be conducted by other Alliance forces, they do so with a unique set of conditions and standards.”<sup>18</sup>

NATO Army SOF are preparing for execution of three principal missions: Military Assistance (MA), Special Reconnaissance (SR), and Direct Actions (DA). To further reveal the need for Special Forces assessment and selection principles it is necessary to explain in detail the missions of all NATO Army SOF, specified in AJP 3.5 as follows:

1.1. Military assistance—is a broad category of measures and activities that support and influence critical friendly assets through organizing training, advising, mentoring, or the conduct of combined operations. The range of MA includes, but is not limited to, capability-building of friendly security forces, engagement with local, regional, and national leadership or organizations, and civic actions supporting and influencing the local population. SOF conduct MA within their field of expertise. More specifically, MA activities may include:

1.1.1. Training

1.1.2. Advising

1.1.3. Mentoring/Partnering<sup>19</sup>

1.2. Special Reconnaissance—is conducted to support the collection of a commander’s Priority Intelligence Requirements (PIRs) by employing unique capabilities or Joint Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (JISR) assets. As part of the Allied theatre INTEL collection process, SR provides specific, well-defined, and possibly time-sensitive information of strategic or operational significance. It may complement other collection methods where constraints are imposed by weather, terrain-masking, hostile countermeasures, or other systems’ availability. SR places persistent “eyes on target” in a hostile, denied, or politically sensitive territory. SOF can provide timely information by using their judgment and initiative in a way that technical JISR cannot. SOF may conduct these tasks separately, supported by, in conjunction with, or in support of other component commands. They may use advanced reconnaissance and surveillance techniques, JISR assets and equipment, and collection methods, sometimes augmented by the employment of indigenous assets. Activities within SR can include:

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<sup>18</sup> NATO Standardization Agency, *Allied Joint Doctrine for Special Operation*, AJP-3.5, ed. A, v.1 (Brussels: NSA December 2013), 2-1.

<sup>19</sup> NATO Standardization Agency, *Allied Joint Doctrine for Special Operation*, AJP-3.5, 2-1.

#### 1.2.1. Environmental Reconnaissance

#### 1.2.2. Threat Assessment

#### 1.2.3. Target Assessment

#### 1.2.4. Post-Strike Reconnaissance<sup>20</sup>

1.3. Direct Action—DA is a precise offensive operation conducted by SOF which is limited in scope and duration in order to seize, destroy, disrupt, capture, exploit, recover, or damage high value or high pay-off targets. DA differs from conventional offensive actions in the level of risk, techniques employed, and the degree of precision utilized to create a specific effect and usually incorporates a planned withdrawal from the immediate objective area. DA is focused on specific, well-defined targets of strategic and operational significance, or in the conduct of decisive tactical operations. SOF may conduct DA independently, with support from conventional forces, or in support of conventional forces. Activities within DA can include:

##### 1.3.1. Raids, Ambushes, and Assaults

##### 1.3.2. Terminal Guidance Operations

##### 1.3.3. Recovery Operations

##### 1.3.4. Precision Destruction Operations<sup>21</sup>

1.4. SOF Activities within the Allied Joint—these principal tasks are applied to support—but are not limited to—the followed activities:

1.4.1. Counter-insurgency (COIN)—SOF can effectively complement the overarching application of diplomatic, economic, military, and information Alliances' instruments of power, applied in a COIN role. When preparing for COIN, SOF can provide area assessments and an early command, control, and communications capability. During COIN, SOF could conduct MA, SR, DA, or a suitable combination of these principal tasks, to support Allied joint operations in order to accomplish the defined political and strategic objectives. The success of these operations can be enhanced by the conduct of technical exploitation operations (TEO).<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> NATO Standardization Agency, 2-2.

<sup>21</sup> NATO Standardization Agency, 2-3.

<sup>22</sup> NATO Standardization Agency, 2-4.

1.4.2. Counterterrorism (CT)—is an overarching umbrella of offensive measures designed to reduce the vulnerability of Allied interests, their forces, individuals, and property to terrorism, to include counter-force activities and containment by military force and civil agencies. SOF should be utilized when there is high risk, a need for special capabilities or a requirement to conduct covert or clandestine operations. These forces can operate in concert with other joint force efforts or operate independently by conducting DA (while minimizing collateral damage), SR, or MA. The success of these operations can be enhanced by the conduct of TEO.<sup>23</sup>

1.4.3. Countering Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) as well as Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear (CBRN) Materials—SOF are a significant part of Allied capabilities to support NATO's counter-proliferation and trafficking objectives related to WMD and CBRN related materials, including the ability to conduct, with other specialized elements, WMD disablement missions. WMD disablement is generally described as operations whose aim is to systematically locate, secure, characterize, eliminate, or dispose WMD, CBRN weapons, CBRN devices and CBRN materials, and/or a potential adversary's capability to research, develop, test, produce, stockpile, deploy, or employ such weapons, devices, and materials. Activities designed to conduct WMD disablement missions are inherently complex and generally necessitate the employment of specially trained and equipped personnel. In the context of a NATO operation, NATO SOF involvement in the WMD disablement missions will generally be referred to the members of the Alliance possessing these specialized capabilities. In extremis, however, where specialized forces cannot be brought in sufficient time to prevent the employment of WMD and/or CBRN materials, or their immediate interdiction is required, the authority to utilize other NATO forces, to include NATO SOF, to capture, deter, secure, or assist in WMD disablement mission, might be sought.<sup>24</sup>

1.4.4. Hostage Release Operations (HRO)—are a priority national responsibility. Due to their sensitive nature, they require significant national diplomatic, military, civilian and legal high-level solutions and bilateral or international arrangements. Other countries can only engage in support for the state where the hostage situation has occurred. Only in the presence of such arrangements, SOF may be deployed to perform HRO mission.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> NATO Standardization Agency, 2-4.

<sup>24</sup> NATO Standardization Agency, 2-4, 2-5.

<sup>25</sup> Raykov, Ivan V., "Participation of the SOF in Operations for Contribution to National Security in Peacetime," Master's thesis, Bulgarian Defence College, 2018, 27–28.

2.3.5. Faction Liaison—in order to gain a better understanding of the operating environment, situational awareness, and to collect information, SOF can liaise with many factions in a Joint Operational Area (JOA). The information available at the different host actors is often vital in support of full spectrum special operations. The assignment of capable liaison officers can be especially relevant in supporting MA tasks. They are important for INTEL partnering/mentoring which should improve the information collection in remote areas in using indigenous elements. The information has to be integrated into the INTEL process/cycle in order to develop joint INTEL preparation of the battlespace, disseminate assessments and reports, and support the operations planning process.<sup>26</sup>

## **B. HISTORY OF SPECIAL FORCES ASSESSMENT AND SELECTION**

Personnel selection for elite units has been practiced throughout history—from the Spartan warriors in ancient Sparta, where children were selected for military training, to Praetorian Guards in the Roman Empire, who were recruited from the best soldiers of the legions. The recent history of selecting personnel for “Special-Missions” units in countries such as Germany, the United States, Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, and Great Britain can be traced back to WWI, and, more significantly, to the beginning and during the WWII, followed by turbulent development in the second half of the 20th century.

As the research looks at the assessment and selection processes in different countries, it is important to get an idea of the origin of the SFAS. This chapter briefly describes the historical background of the assessment and selection of the Parachute Group—the predecessor of the Bulgarian Special Forces—as well as the history of Special Forces assessment and selection of the U.S. Army SOF.

### **1. Bulgarian Parachute Group – Special Forces Selection and Assessment Background**

The Bulgarian experience with the assessment and selection process started at the beginning of the World War II, when in the autumn of 1940 the Bulgarian War Department and its Army Staff decided to form a parachute company. Unfortunately, there is not sufficient available information and there are not enough details about the whole process for assessment and selection of the Parachute Group—the predecessor of the BUSOF. The

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<sup>26</sup> NATO Standardization Agency, *Allied Joint Doctrine for Special Operation*, AJP-3.5, 2-5.

decision to create the Parachute Group had been conditioned by political, economic, and military factors. The execution of the decision started in the spring of 1942, when Army Headquarters started selecting the appointed officers, NCOs, and soldiers from all divisions of the Bulgarian Army. The guideline was that the recruited candidates have to be young soldiers, born in 1920 and 1921, who wished to become paratroopers. The officers and NCOs were allowed into the selection process, regardless of their specialty. At the end of May 1942, the Vrazhdebna Airport Health Examination Institute administered the final examinations from a specially appointed commission, supported by Bulgarian military advisers and German officers. After the initial assessment and selection procedure, including medical, psychological, physical fitness, and hyperbaric chamber tests, 500 out of 5,000 candidates had been approved and sent for subsequent training in Germany. Using the German model for its organization, as well as German equipment and armament, the Parachute Group was the most qualified and best equipped unit in the Bulgarian Army—the prototype of today’s Bulgarian Special Forces.<sup>27</sup>

## **2. The U.S. Army Special Forces Assessment and Selection Background**

More detailed is the information about the history of the SFAS of the U.S. Army SOF. The first procedure for selecting personnel for the U.S. Army was introduced in 1917. Among the requirements for the recruits was the age criterion—the candidates had to be 21–30 years old. Also required were a physical examination and a newly developed intelligence-quotient test.<sup>28</sup> The selection process underwent significant improvement at the beginning of WWII, a year after the establishment of the OSS. Influenced by the German Officer Selection Program and the British War Officer Selection Board, in 1943 the OSS set up an assessment and selection program for unconventional units. In *Selection of Personnel for Clandestine Operations: Assessment of Men* the author lists the principles for assessing the candidates, which included seven major variables basic to the needs of the OSS, plus three more special qualifications added to the list:

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<sup>27</sup> Gerov, “Възникване и развитие на специалните сили в Българската армия” [Creation and development of the Bulgarian Special Operations Forces], 7–8.

<sup>28</sup> Sam Young, “A Short History of SF Assessment and Selection,” *Special Warfare* 9, no. 2 (May 1996), 22.

1. Motivation for Assignment: war morale, interest in the proposed job.
2. Energy and Initiative: activity level, zest, effort, initiative.
3. Effective intelligence: ..., good judgment in dealing with things, people, or ideas.
4. Emotional Stability: the ability to manage disturbing emotions, steadiness, and endurance under pressure....
5. Social Relations: ability to get along well with other people, good will, team play....
6. Leadership: social initiative, ability to evoke cooperation, organizing and administrating ability, acceptance of responsibility.
7. Security: ability to keep secrets, caution, discretion, ability to bluff and to mislead.
8. Physical ability: agility, daring, ruggedness, stamina.
9. Observing and reporting: ability to observe and remember accurately significant facts and their relation, to evaluate information, to report succinctly.
10. Propaganda skills: ability to appreciate the psychological vulnerability of the enemy, to devise subversive techniques.<sup>29</sup>

After the end of the WWII, the OSS was disbanded, and at the beginning of the Cold War, the new era for U.S. SOF started. In 1952 the 10th Special Forces Group was activated at Fort Bragg. Mentored by OSS veterans, the selection process they used was different from the process for the OSS. The candidates were required to satisfy the following criteria:

- Meet the physical qualifications for parachute duty
- Score a minimum of 200 on physical-fitness test
- Not be over age 36, with exceptions granted
- Have completed 10 weeks of basic training
- Be airborne-qualified or volunteer for airborne training<sup>30</sup>

In the 1950s the Special Forces volunteers underwent physically challenging and mentally stressful training, but otherwise, there was no Special Forces assessment and selection mechanism separate from the training course.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Fiske, *Selection of Personnel for Clandestine Operations: Assessment of Men*, 30–31.

<sup>30</sup> Fiske, 30–31.

<sup>31</sup> James Velky, "Special Forces Assessment and Selection," *Special Warfare* 3, no. 1 (May 1990), 13. [https://static.dvidshub.net/media/pubs/pdf\\_8266.pdf](https://static.dvidshub.net/media/pubs/pdf_8266.pdf).

Later, in 1961 the assessment and selection approach was changed, making it more difficult. New prerequisites to be met by the candidates were added to the already existing criteria of 1952:

- Have an interim secret security clearance
- Be able to swim
- Pass the Special Forces Selection Battery<sup>32</sup>

In the same year, the Army Special Warfare School introduced the Special Forces Selection Battery, with the aim to screen out the candidates who were not suitable for the Special Forces standards.<sup>33</sup>

The selection battery consisted of four tests: the Special Forces Suitability Inventory—to measure personality aspects suitable for SF activity; the Critical Decisions Test—to measure a soldier's risk, or chance-taking tendencies; the Locations Test—to measure a soldier's ability to perceive terrain features by reading a map; and the Infantry Aptitude Area—to measure soldiers' potential for developing infantry skills.<sup>34</sup>

In the mid-1980s, realizing the need for change in the SFAS in order to save training time and resources, Col. Richard Potter assigned the development of a new selection program. In 1987 Maj. James Velky and Master Sgt. John Heimberger began working on the project “with the Army Research Institute to define desirable personality traits and effective methods of assessing human behavior.”<sup>35</sup> The recent version of the assessment and selection course was conducted in June 1988. In 1989 the program was renamed Special Forces Assessment and Selection Course, whose goal was to identify soldiers and officers “who can be trained to perform effectively in an unpredictable, adverse and hostile environment and be dedicated to their profession.”<sup>36</sup> The SFAS assessed each candidate's potential to be independent, as well to work in a team, and to be a leader, looking for the following basic traits:

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<sup>32</sup> Young, “A Short History of SF Assessment and Selection,” 24.

<sup>33</sup> Young, 24.

<sup>34</sup> Young, 24.

<sup>35</sup> Young, 25–26.

<sup>36</sup> Velky, “Special Forces Assessment and Selection,” 14.

- Physical fitness
- Motivation
- Intelligence
- Responsibility
- Stability
- Trustworthiness
- Sociability
- Leadership<sup>37</sup>

During the SFAS, each candidate underwent mental, learning, and personality tests to capture his or her profile. The following tests were included:

- Defense Language Aptitude Battery
- Audio Perception Battery
- Wonderlic Personnel (Intelligence)
- Jackson Personality
- Minnesota Multifacet Personality Inventory (in-depth personality battery)<sup>38</sup>

Additionally, there were 21-day field assessment activities tests, including:

- Physical fitness and swimming tests
- Short, medium, and long-distance runs
- Obstacle course
- Short, medium, and long-range movements (with weapon and field equipment)
- Military orienteering [land navigation] (with weapon and field equipment)
- Log drills
- Problem-solving events<sup>39</sup>

The selection program has been changed and redesigned to meet the requirements of the U.S Army in the changing environment since the SFAS was implemented in 1988. In the 21st century the U.S. Army SOF and the Army Research Institute identified the key attributes that define candidates' suitability to continue Special Forces training, including:

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<sup>37</sup> Velky, 14.

<sup>38</sup> Velky, 14.

<sup>39</sup> Velky, 14.



- Cognitive ability
- Physical fitness
- Initiative
- Moral courage
- Dependability
- Maturity
- Perseverance
- Judgment
- Decision-making
- Team-player ability
- Persuasiveness and communication<sup>40</sup>

Maintaining high-standard requirements, the latest design of SFAS was focused on land navigation as a link between SFAS, SFQC, and Special Forces field operations, as well included an obstacle course, rappelling, running, and rucksack marches. The new SFAS program did not grade the performance of the candidates for individual events; rather, it used “the whole man” concept—“comprehensive grading process to evaluate the overall performance.”<sup>41</sup>

The origin of the foundations of today’s selection and assessment programs has been created and developed over time from the first special/elite units, selected and organized for missions different from the rest of the conventional units during WWII. Later, realizing the essence and requirements of Special Forces units, the SFAS was developed, and according to Brigadier General Potter, “SFAS is based on four principles: physically demanding, sleep deprivation, induced stress, and increasing performance objectives.”<sup>42</sup> Today, the SFAS programs are not only selecting the right soldiers and screening out those who lack the desired qualities but also these programs save resources and time for training invested in candidates who are not suitable for service in the Special Forces. Moreover, the SFAS reduces the attrition rate during the SFQC and during Special Forces service. From the historical lessons learned and in the current security environment,

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<sup>40</sup> Robert Marss, Marss, Robert. “SFAS Redesign: An Essential Evolution,” *Special Warfare* 13, no. 4, (Fall 2000), 3. [https://static.dvidshub.net/media/pubs/pdf\\_8125.pdf](https://static.dvidshub.net/media/pubs/pdf_8125.pdf).

<sup>41</sup> Marss, “SFAS Redesign: An Essential Evolution,” 4–5.

<sup>42</sup> Sean P. Feeley, “Special Forces Assessment and Selection” (master’s thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 1998), 12.

a proper assessment and selection program should be developed and modified accordingly, as an integral part of every respected special/elite unit of every country. The necessity of SFAS is conditioned by, and incorporated in, many definitions of the SOF, such as: “SF are small, high-quality, elite military units with the skills, physical capabilities, and mental strength.”<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Christopher Chant, *Special Forces: History-Roles and Missions-Training-Weapons and Equipment-Combat Scenarios Bath BAI I HE* (U.K.: Paragon Books, Ltd., 2012), 8.

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## **IV. THE SURVEY**

This chapter, composed of three parts, provides the main body of information needed to develop a new strategy for the improvement and development of the SFAS process in BUSOF. This information is extracted from the conducted research. The first part of the chapter introduces and justifies the method used for finding the information necessary to answer the research questions of the study. The second part examines the current specifics of the recruitment process, its procedures, and the requirements for the candidates for Bulgarian Special Forces—civilian and military. The third part includes summarized answers from this author’s interviews with eight NATO SOF representatives at United States Special Operational Command (USSOCOM), giving basic information about the requirements and guidelines used by the units during the SFAS process.

### **A. METHODOLOGY**

This study finds the answer to the question: How can the Bulgarian Joint Special Operations Command draw from the experience of U.S. and other NATO Army Special Forces in conducting the SFAS process during Phase I of the SFQC, to develop a new the assessment and selection process for finding the most suitable personnel?

Analyzing the current admission process for the BUSOF and different NATO SOF units’ SFAS processes, the study identifies the most important principles applied during the SFAS to identify prospective officers and soldiers for the BJSOCOM. The study also considers whether the current admission process is addressing these principles. For that purpose, the study follows four steps to examine how different NATO SOF units conduct the SFAS process and what principles for screening and selecting the prospective Special Forces personnel for operational units are most important for those units.

The first step was to create a questionnaire with standard questions to figure out and compare the missions, and identify the individual personnel requirements applied during the screening process, during the selection, and in the post-selection period; determine what elements of the selection processes different countries share, and what qualities they look for in the candidates. It is important to study the example of different

selection processes to find out what SFAS principles and standards they use, what kind of people they are trying to identify, and how the process is structured. The questions for interviews with SOF members from different countries about the process of SFAS, included in the questionnaire were the following:

**General questions:**

What is the nationality and designation/name of the unit?

Is the unit considered or designated a “special operations” unit?

What are the missions of the unit?

What is the number and what are the various military specialties of the unit (Operational Detachment Alpha (ODA)) members?

How are personnel recruited or assigned to be candidates for the unit?

Does the unit have a selection process for its recruited or assigned personnel?

**Questions about the process of screening/pre-selection:**

What categories of candidates are considered for selection to the unit?

If women are considered for selection to the unit, for what positions?

Are there any differences in screening and selection requirements for any categories of candidates?

What are the entry-level requirements for candidates?

What is assessed in the entry-level medical/physical examination?

What are the requirements for military volunteers?

What is considered in the background investigation?

What are the minimum standards for the physical fitness of candidates?

What personal qualities are assessed during screening/pre-selection?

**Questions concerning the selection:**

What is the unit/cadre that runs the selection course?

How are the cadre for the selection course chosen?

What are the standards for successful selection?

What is the selection process?

**Questions about the post-selection procedures:**

Once personnel are selected, do they directly join the unit, or do they take further training?

How long are selected personnel required to serve in the unit?

How long are selected personnel allowed to serve in the unit?

While serving in the unit, are personnel periodically re-assessed?

How are non-selected personnel managed?

Second, a review of the current admission process that the BUSOF has now and objective analysis of whether it meets the NATO SOF principles and standards was conducted.

Third, to answer the interview questions, the author made a review of the existing literature and performed primary research by conducting interviews with the available senior European NATO SOF representatives at the USSOCOM. In some cases, these interviews were also backed up by further interviews with fellow Special Forces NPS students. For more details of the individual interviews conducted, refer to the appendixes to this thesis.

Lastly, after comparing the results from the interviews to the current SFAS process for BUSOF personnel, and how other countries are running their SFAS processes, combined with the literature review, the study reaches several conclusions. Furthermore, it can provide recommendations about what should be changed, how the current SFAS

process for BUSOF personnel can be improved, what principles should be used in the process, and what types of persons the BJSOCOM should look for.

The method used in the project is a qualitative comparison between the principles used for assessment and selection of personnel in the Bulgarian Special Forces and NATO SOF units from different countries. For that purpose, the information from the available U.S. unclassified written sources were reviewed, and the responses from interviews with the European-based NATO SOF units were collected, using the questionnaire prepared in advance. Also collected in interviews, were responses to the questionnaire from senior Special Forces representatives at USSOCOM and the available NPS Special Forces students. The collected information was then summarized and serves as the basis for the conclusions and recommendations presented in the next chapter.

## **B. CURRENT BULGARIAN SFAS PROCEDURES OVERVIEW**

To develop a new selection process, first it is critical to determine what the current selection process is, what it selects for, and what kind of people BUSOF wants its personnel to be. For that purpose, the current criteria used during the selection process was analyzed and the regulating documents were examined. Describing the specific tasks, the ODA organization, and the general requirements for application, followed by the basic pre-screening requirements and the screening/testing standards for the volunteers, demonstrated that there is no real assessment and selection process for the candidates for BUSOF.

### **1. General Information and Basic Requirements for the Candidates for Bulgarian 68th Special Forces Brigade**

The BJSOCOM is based on the Bulgarian 68th Special Forces Brigade. As part of the Bulgarian Armed Forces (BAF), BUSOF is tasked to ensure the sovereignty, security, and independence of the country and protect its territorial integrity, in accordance with Article 9 of the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria. In order to fulfill these duties and their associated tasks, the BAF have to have a number of capabilities that are conceived in the three main missions—Defense, Support to International Peace and Security, and Contribution to National Security in Peacetime.

The Bulgarian SOF are part of Allied Special Operations Forces, the principal tasks of which are defined in AJP-3.5, chapter 2. According to AJP-3.5, there are three such tasks that SOF conduct: Military Assistance, Special Reconnaissance, and Direct Action.<sup>44</sup> Besides resolution of non-military crises and the implementation of the mission “Contribution to national security in peacetime,” according to the National Defense Strategy of Republic of Bulgaria, the BUSOF can carry out the following important independent or joint operations and activities with other government organizations:

- Early warning of potential risks and threats
- Control of air and sea spaces
- Countering terrorism and overcoming the consequences of terrorism
- Supporting the control of migration
- Participation in operations to restrain and neutralize extremist and criminal groups
- Protection of strategic sites
- Explosive ordnance disposal (EOD)
- Providing humanitarian aid
- Search and rescue operations
- Protection and assistance of the population in case of natural disasters and ecological catastrophes
- Participation in the protection of the state border
- Assistance of other government organizations<sup>45</sup>

As in most SOF units, the BUSOF is made up of its “building blocks”—Special Forces combat platoon or ODA. Each ODA consists of a ten-member team:

- Detachment Commander
- Deputy Detachment Commander
- Intelligence NCO

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<sup>44</sup> NATO Standardization Agency, Allied Joint Doctrine for Special Operation.

<sup>45</sup> Government of the Republic of Bulgaria. *National Defense Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria*. Sofia: Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Bulgaria, April 2011, 12. file:///C:/Users/User/Downloads/National%20Defense%20Strategy.pdf.



- Assistant Intelligence NCO
- Engineer NCO
- Assistant Engineer NCO
- Medical NCO
- Assistant Medical NCO
- Communications NCO
- Assistant Communications NCO

According to the regulations and legislation—The Law on Defense and Armed Forces of the Republic of Bulgaria (LDAFRB) and the rules for the application of LDAFRB, the personnel of the BUSOF are recruited from the graduates of the Bulgarian military academies, and civilian universities and high schools within the territory of Bulgaria and abroad.<sup>46</sup> The number of applicants per fiscal year is conditioned by the vacancies in the unit and by the funding provided by the Ministry of Defense, not by the current personnel needs of the unit.

While there is a formal application process for the BAF, the BUSOF does not have a “real” assessment and selection process for the new candidates. The selection/screening process is unified for the BAF as a whole in the form of exams/tests, including physical fitness test, comprehensive intelligence test, and an interview with the candidate. This process does not differ from any other military unit within the Bulgarian Armed Forces.<sup>47</sup>

BUSOF accepts volunteer candidates, male and female; officer and enlisted from other branches of the BAF; and civilians “off the street.” Since there are no restrictions for women to apply for positions in BUSOF, women can apply for any available positions in the combat units, combat service support units, and particular staff positions, if they meet the entry criteria. Junior officers could be assigned after graduating Bulgarian or foreign (NATO) military universities. Senior officers can apply if they meet the needed

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<sup>46</sup> Government of the Republic of Bulgaria. *Republic of Bulgaria Defence and Armed Forces Act*. Sofia: May 2009, [https://www.mod.bg/bg/doc/zakoni/20190531\\_ZOVS\\_RB.pdf](https://www.mod.bg/bg/doc/zakoni/20190531_ZOVS_RB.pdf).

<sup>47</sup> 68th Special Forces Brigade. “Announcement for Conducting a Contest for Soldier’s Postpositions for Military Service in 68th SF Brigade,” Plovdiv: 68th Special Forces Brigade, August 2019.

qualifications for available positions, with no other requirements. The civilian candidates are the only ones who undergo the unified process of the established procedures of screening, after that they have to first undergo a basic military training.

Nevertheless, BUSOF does not have Special Forces assessment and selection process for finding the best suited candidates—civilian and military—soldiers, NCOs, and officers, which is seen from the requirements in the current recruitment process.

## **2. The Current Requirements for Civilian Candidates**

Civilian volunteers are the basic candidates for filling the ranks of the BUSOF. Therefore, most of the application requirements are directed toward them. When applying for the BUSOF, a civilian candidate must submit the required documents for application and comply with the following initial Bulgarian military requirements:<sup>48</sup>

- Citizenship: For consideration in the Bulgarian Armed Forces/BUSOF only Bulgarian citizens may apply, no other citizenship is eligible.
- Legal considerations: The candidates must have clear records and must not have been convicted of any intentional crime, regardless of rehabilitation. Additionally, the candidates must have no criminal proceedings against them for a deliberate general crime. Moreover, after the civilian candidate's application for military service is submitted, a security clearance investigation is conducted.
- Level of education: The minimum level of education required is a high school diploma from Bulgarian and/or foreign high schools for soldiers. A Bachelor's or Master's degree is not required but gives the candidate extra credit for the final ranking.

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<sup>48</sup> 68th Special Forces Brigade, "Announcement for Conducting a Contest for Soldier's Postpositions for Military Service in 68th SF Brigade."

- Foreign language: Fluency in foreign languages is not required, but an English language proficiency certificate according to STANAG 600 of NATO gives extra credits.
- General medical standard: For applying for military service within BAF, a medical-expert decision, issued by the Central Military Medical Commission at the Bulgarian Military Medical Academy, must certify that a candidate is medically fit. The main application difference between the BUSOF and the conventional military units within the BAF is that when both civilian and military candidates apply for combat BUSOF units, they must pass a special detailed medical examination that certifies them capable for high altitude parachute jumps. These specific medical tests are necessary because BUSOF (like every other SOF unit) performs different tasks related to a greater load of physical and mental stress—parachute jumps, diving, mountain training, etc.
- Assessment of psychological suitability: This assessment measures the mental stability of the volunteers. The candidates for military service undergo psychological assessment carried out by military psychologists from the Center for Mental Health and Prevention at the Bulgarian Military Medical Academy in accordance with the legal framework for the psychological assessment of the service members of the Ministry of Defense, the BAF, and the structures under the direct subordination of the Minister of Defense.<sup>49</sup>

Besides these pre-screening procedures, the civilian volunteers undergo the unified screening procedure, including the results from the physical fitness test and comprehensive intelligence test and an interview.

- Physical Fitness Test: This test measures the physical performance and physical qualities of the candidates. It is based on the “Program for Physical

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<sup>49</sup> 68th Special Forces Brigade, “Announcement for Conducting a Contest for Soldier’s Postpositions for Military Service in 68th SF Brigade.”

Training and Sport in the Armed Forces of the Republic of Bulgaria.” It lists the fixed standards and the minimum requirements that each candidate for soldier, regardless of the branch/unit he or she is applying for, must meet, depending on the candidate’s age and gender.<sup>50</sup> The complex of exercises, called the Unified Armed Forces Physical Fitness Test,<sup>51</sup> includes four components:

- One minute of sit-ups
- One minute of push-ups
- Ten times of 10-meter “shuttle-run”
- Run—1,000 meters

Every component of the test ranges from zero to 100 points, with a maximum total of 400 points for the four components. An applicant who has received fewer than 200 points on the Unified Armed Forces Physical Fitness Test or fewer than 30 points on a separate component is dropped from the competition and does not qualify.<sup>52</sup>

- Comprehensive Intelligence Test: This test measures the intelligence of the candidates. Fixed standards of the test check the candidate’s common intelligence. The 60-minute Comprehensive Intelligence Test includes 100 questions. The candidates must demonstrate knowledge of Bulgarian language—spelling and grammar, Bulgarian history, international politics, and general knowledge of geography, physics, etc. If an applicant receives fewer than 40 points he or she is dropped from the competition and does not qualify.
- Interview: The interview measures the motivation of the candidate for military service; during an interview the candidates answer questions by designated

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<sup>50</sup> There are different physical training standards for males and females, according to the “Program for Physical Training and Sport in the Armed Forces of the Republic of Bulgaria.” In addition, the required standards are lowered for older candidates.

<sup>51</sup> 68th Special Forces Brigade, “Announcement for Conducting a Contest for Soldier’s Postpositions for Military Service in 68th SF Brigade,” Annex 2.

<sup>52</sup> 68th Special Forces Brigade, “Announcement for Conducting a Contest for Soldier’s Postpositions for Military Service in 68th SF Brigade,” Annex 2.

officers from the unit about their motivation to become part of BUSOF. There are no fixed standards for conducting the interview.

The ranking of the civilian candidates is formed as the sum of the following:

- The sum of the entering points\*
- The result of the physical fitness test
- The result of the comprehensive intelligence test

\* The sum of the entering points is calculated according to a validated methodology taking into account the military occupational specialty (MOS) (if the candidate has a military experience), the civilian qualification, the additional qualifications, the educational level, the diploma from high-school (or higher) education, and the length of previous military service in the BAF.

Despite the current pre-screening and screening processes which check the criminal background and the basic abilities of the civilian candidates, there is no guarantee that after passing these requirements, the right people enter the BUSOF.

### **3. Current Requirements for Military Candidates**

The military candidates are the second, much smaller group of volunteers for filling the ranks in BUSOF. This is due to the difficult procedure for changing military units or branches within the BAF. Since these candidates are already in military service in the BAF, it is assumed that the current requirements for them do not need to be as “hard” as they are for the civilian candidates. When applying for the BUSOF, the military volunteers are allowed to apply for positions available according to their ranks and qualifications. Furthermore, they must meet the following requirements:

- Legal considerations: The military candidates can apply if they have not been released from military service due to a disciplinary order.
- Educational level: For officers, a Bachelor’s or Master’s degree is required. Until 2018, the only way to become an officer in the BAF was to go through the full cycle of military education and graduate from military universities/academies. Since 2018, Bachelor’s/Master’s degree graduates from civilian

universities can become officers after a nine-month military leadership course at the Bulgarian National Military University.

For NCOs, there are no specific requirements, but higher education always gives extra credit, if their ranks match the positions they apply for.

- Medical standards: Junior officers (second lieutenant–captain) can apply for team leader/platoon commander in combat units, after passing the special medical examination that certifies them capable of high altitude parachute jumps. For other, non-command positions in the combat units, there are only general medical requirements. Senior officers without experience in BUSOF can apply only for staff positions, which only carry general medical requirements.
- Other requirements: For military candidates for the combat units within the BUSOF, passing the medical standards that certify them capable for high altitude parachute jumps, eliminate the requirements for passing either the physical fitness tests or any other tests when applying for, or changing units, or positions within the BUSOF.

#### **4. Selection/Testing Regulations, Defining the Application and the Requirements for the Time of Service in the BUSOF**

The selection process is more appropriately referred to as the testing process of the candidates. The testing/screening of personnel applying for acceptance into BAF, and respectively in the BUSOF, is conducted based on the Rules for Implementation of the Defense and LDAFRB, the annual Ministerial Order defining the procedure for assignment and re-assignment of military personnel to positions within the BAF.

An Evaluation Board, appointed by order of the BUSOF COM is responsible for the processing of application documents, conducting the initial screening of the candidates, and conducting the assessment through the physical fitness test, the comprehensive intelligence test, and the interview, during the test phase. Then those who have passed the

assessment enter the “green team” at the BUSOF Training Center,<sup>53</sup> where the selecting/testing along with the training continues. As during the basic and qualification training, the selection/testing takes place during and especially at the end of each phase. If a candidate does not pass the final exams of each phase, his or her military service contract is terminated. The duration of the basic and qualification training is six to nine months, depending on the MOS.

The BUSOF Training Center consists of officers and NCOs who have some experience from service in the Special Forces combat units. They have not, however, received specialized training on how to select personnel. The basic training/selecting and qualification courses that they conduct are in accordance with the standards imposed in the Bulgarian 68th Special Forces Brigade and their personal and professional experience. When the candidates have successfully passed the assessment and the testing, a signed contract between the selected candidate and the unit defines the duration of military service. Otherwise, there are no other requirements for the duration of the service in BUSOF. After that, the recruits are assigned to the positions in the unit they apply for, but they join the teams after completing the selection/training process, where they acquire a MOS and receive basic and qualification training. For the members of the BUSOF, there are no limitations on the time of service. Personnel can serve in the unit as long as they can meet the medical and physical standards and the operational requirements for the occupied position in BUSOF.

Nevertheless, once in BUSOF, during the time of service there is no re-assessment of the personnel, in terms of Special Forces qualification assessment. Additionally, in the BUSOF the only re-assessed standard, on a regular basis, is the physical fitness test. Every service member in the BAF/BUSOF is annually evaluated on his or her overall performance by his or her direct command structure, through the formalized process of Personal Attestation.

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<sup>53</sup> Within the organizational structure of the Bulgarian 68th Special Forces Brigade there is a designated permanent unit—the BUSOF Training Center—responsible for conducting basic training/selecting and providing the qualification courses of the accepted candidates.

A member of BUSOF can be released involuntarily from military service before the signed contract is over, due to gross disciplinary offenses, for Driving under Influence (DUI), or for medical issues.

In BUSOF, the candidates who do not meet the criteria for military service or cannot pass the psychological or medical examinations required specifically for BUSOF are not retained.

Civilian candidates can apply again for the unit in accordance with the requirements specified in the LDAFRB. If the military candidates cannot pass the psychological or medical examinations, they continue their military service in the original unit they come from. The military candidates are not released from the original units they come from until they pass all the requirements to become a part of BUSOF.

## **5. Summary**

The information in this section provided an overview of the legal regulations for the current process of conducting assessment and selection and testing of the candidates for the BAF. The description of the process reveals that the same unified requirements for the civilian candidates for the BAF's conventional military units are applied to the volunteers for the BUSOF. Additionally, there are no requirements, besides the specific medical examination, for officers graduating from military schools/academies and other military candidates who apply for the vacancies in the unit.

Yet, the missions and the tasks of the conventional military units of the BAF are different from those of the BUSOF, which require a different type of person for execution of those missions. To find suitable candidates for the specifics of the missions of the SOF, it is important to apply different and higher standards than those for the conventional military forces. In addition, the task requires a comprehensive selection process for assessment of multiple attributes of the volunteers, both civilian and military. But there is no real Special Forces assessment and selection process in the BUSOF. The current process demonstrates a low level of the pre-screening requirements and the assessment of an insufficient number of qualities and attributes of the candidates during the testing phase. The current requirements for the candidates for BJSOCOMs' combat units are



incompatible with the nature of the high-value, high-responsibility missions entrusted to them.

## **C. THE SURVEY**

The basic information for the study, that throw light on the process of finding the right type of person and the principles used by other NATO SOF units during the SFAS, is based on the survey.

### **1. Background**

A questionnaire formed the basis for interviews on the experience of eight of the European-based NATO SOF units in conducting their respective Special Forces assessment and selection processes. This was done in order to gather broader information about the recruitment, screening, SFAS process, and Special Forces qualification training, and requirements for service in different SOF units (details from the interviews are provided in Appendixes A to H). The collected data would help to define the basic requirements, the guidelines for Special Forces selection, and the desired profile of the prospective Special Forces personnel, which could be used to develop a new assessment and selection process for the BUSOF.

The survey was in the form of an interview consisting of 24 questions, and the questions were separated into four groups: 1) general questions; 2) screening/pre-selection; 3) selection; and 4) post-selection. The interviewer asked questions about the missions, general individual requirements for application, the screening standards and selection processes, and the units' service requirements in the post-selection period; what the guidelines for selecting candidates are, and what kind of people and what qualities do they look for during the SFAS before the candidates can be accepted in a SOF unit? The questionnaire was disseminated via official email correspondence between author and the pre-selected available senior NATO SOF representatives at the United States Special Operations Command.

## **2. Results from the Survey**

The results from the survey are represented as summarized information, as well as specific information about the studied SOF units, based on the answers after each question from the interview. This approach illustrates not only the similarities and differences among the units for conducting selection but also outlines the “big picture” of the SFAS process in these different NATO SOF units from different countries. The questions and the summarized results from the answers (Appendixes A to H) are presented in the following paragraphs.

- What is the nationality and designation/name of the unit?
- Is the unit considered or designated a “special operations” unit?

The answers to these first two questions are combined because of the close connection between the questions. Senior active duty representatives from eight European-based NATO SOF units participated in the survey. They are currently serving at the USSOCOM in Tampa, Florida. All units in the survey are designated as SOF units, including:

Belgian Special Forces Group

Czech Republic 601<sup>st</sup> Special Forces Group (CZE Tier 1)

Danish Army SOF “Jægerkorpset”

German Army SOF “Kommando Spezialkräfte” (KSK)

Netherlands/ Dutch Army SOF “Korps Commandotroepen”

Norwegian “Marinejegers” in “Marinejegerkommandoen” (MJK), also called Norwegian Naval Special Operations Commandos (NORNAVSOC).

Polish Special Mission Unit “Grupa Reagowania Operacyjno-Manewrowego” (GROM)

Romanian SF

- What are the missions of the unit?

The missions of all NATO SOF units are defined at Allied Joint Publication-3.5, Chapter 2—Allied Special Operations Forces Principle Tasks. NATO SOF units train and execute three principal missions—Military Assistance (MA), Special Reconnaissance

(SR), and Direct Actions (DA)—as well as all activities supporting the main tasks. Besides the main set of missions, most of the units have additional tasks at the national level. One of the most common missions of the SOF units at the national level is participation in counterterrorist operations. For example, these are the German KSK operational responsibilities: Force Protection, Hostage-rescue Operations, Capture/High-Risk Arrest, Counterterrorism, and Covert Operations.

- What is the number and what are the various military specialties of the unit (ODA) members?

Although the SOF units share almost the same range of missions, among the studied units the basic operational units—the ODAs—are different in size and organization.

The Belgian Special Forces Group: The ODA consists of a six-member-team—commander, assistant commander (who also serves as intelligence specialist at the same time), and the remaining four members share the capabilities of sniper, medic, joint terminal attack controller (JTAC), breacher, communications specialist, and weapons specialist.

The Czech 601st Special Forces Group: This four-member basic team involves a commander (O2 or E7), deputy commander (driver, sniper, or medic), communications specialist, and engineer (demolition). There is also the capability to build task purpose size with additional specialists (sniper, explosives ordnance disposal-EOD, medics-18D, Intel-18F).

The Danish “Jægerkorpset” teams consist of eight operators, including individuals who perform the following functions: team leader, assistant team—intelligence, JTAC, radio/communications specialist, medic (primary), medic (secondary)/sniper observer, sniper, and breacher.

The German KSK teams consist of four operators: communications specialist, weapons specialist, medic, and engineer (demolition).

The Dutch “Korps Commandotroepen”: These are six to eight member teams with the capability of building platoon size, including commander, deputy commander,

communication specialist, medic, weapons specialist (sniper), engineer (demolition), and driver.

The information about the exact size of the basic combat unit of the Norwegian “Marinejegers” is classified. Nonetheless, the teams have the following capabilities and specialists: medics, JTAC/communications specialist, snipers, breachers, and technical exploitation specialist.

The Polish GROM teams consist of six members, including commander, deputy commander, communications specialist, medic, weapon specialist (EOD), and driver.

Romanian Special Forces teams consist of nine to 12 members, resembling the U.S. 12-man ODA, which could include commander, assistant commander, operations sergeant, assistant operations sergeant, two weapons specialists, two communications specialists, two medics, and two engineering specialists. The size and composition of the team can change according to the type of mission.

- How are personnel recruited or assigned to be candidates for the unit?

The lack of constant flow of personnel is one of the main issues for each country, not only for Special Forces recruitment but also for the conventional military as a whole. All NATO SOF units share the requirement to recruit personnel from the armed forces as a primary source for candidates. For example, the personnel for Czech 601st Special Forces Group is recruited from conventional forces units with a minimum of only two years of service experience. Yet, because of the chronic shortage of candidates, most of the units also allow recruits from the civilian market to apply. To make the units “mission capable,” the SOF units have different personnel requirements, depending on the size of the units and the current needs. The recruitment of the units is not based on lowering the standards—as the Norwegian MJK has had years in which no candidate succeeded during the selection process.

- Does the unit have a selection process for its recruited or assigned personnel?

The Special Forces assessment and selection process is one of the major characteristics of the SOF units. All SOF units participating in this research have a dedicated selection process for their personnel who are applying for the operational units. The candidates, both civilian and military (all ranks), go through an extensive assessment and selection process, but these processes are different in duration and scope between the units. In the Danish “Jægerkorpset” selection, the same process is used for all personnel applying for the unit. By contrast, during the selection process for Special Forces operators of the Czech 601st Special Forces Group the psychological standards for officers differ from those for NCOs.

- What categories of candidates are considered for selection to the unit?

The participants in this research are united in their opinion favoring a gender neutral policy for future personnel for their respective SOF units. All of the units studied are taking under consideration all types of volunteer candidates to apply for the Special Forces selection process—civilian and military; male and female—if they pass the initial requirements for the unit. After meeting or exceeding the prerequisites for application, all types of candidates, with no exceptions, undergo the SFAS phase. Thus, the Norwegian MJK does not separate different types of candidates—men and women face the same standards during the selection process for future operators.

- If women are considered for selection to the unit, for what positions?

The answer to this question is directly linked to the previous one. Even though the units participating in the research have a gender-neutral policy that gives equal rights and opportunities to male as well as female candidates, they face the same rigorous selection standards of the units. It should not compromise the standards since the SFAS process for the elite SOF units selects those who are the fittest, the most resilient, the most adaptable, and most suitable for the challenges of the Special Forces missions. At the same time, it turns away the candidates who are not mentally robust enough or physically fit. The results from the SFAS processes in the SOF units participating in the research demonstrated, though, that the female candidates cannot succeed in the selection process and are not

suitable as Special Forces operators, in general. This can be seen from the following answers (see Appendixes C, D, E, and F):

Danish “Jægerkorpset:” “So far, no women have been able to become special operators.”

German KSK: “At this time no woman has passed the selection to become a trooper.”

Dutch “Korps Commandotroepen”: “Currently, no woman has ever made it through the Initial Commando Course.”

Norwegian MJK: “Per now, no woman has made it through the first five weeks.”

Although the female candidates are not considered as successful for operational SOF units, they are taken into consideration as a desired capability for other domains in the staff and combat-support units, including intelligence and logistics.

- Are there any differences in screening and selection requirements for any categories of candidates?

The answers to the question unite again the selection practices within the participating units. The common answer is that there are no differences in the screening and selection requirements for the different categories of candidates—officers-enlisted, male-female, age difference, etc. Everyone who applies for SOF operational units undergoes the same screening and selection process, facing the same standards of the unit. During the Dutch “Korps Commandotroepen” selection process, however, the officers and NCOs have to perform more leadership tasks, based on the fact that they will become leaders in the Dutch SF; similarly, in the German KSK, the officers have additional requirements including to the general selection.

- What are the entry-level requirements for candidates?

The entry-level requirements for the candidates in the different NATO SOF units are similar in many aspects, but there are some differences.

Education: For most of the units, having a high school diploma is a minimum education requirement for the candidates. For some of the SOF units, foreign language knowledge is part of the education level requirements—the Danish SF, Romanian SF, and Belgian SF Group test their candidates for English language comprehension.

Age: The age requirements differ among the nations in the study. The Czech Republic 601st Special Forces Group does not have any policy concerning the age of the candidates. On the other hand, the Danish Special Forces prefers candidates between a minimum of 21 years and less than 31 years of age; the Dutch Special Forces accepts for SF operator selection no one younger than 19 years old at the start of the selection, and no one older than 27 years. Since the Norwegian Armed Forces are based on the conscript service, the Norwegian MJK could apply candidates who complete the 12-month conscription period, which is at the age of 18 to 20. The Polish GROM selects people for Special Forces operators no older than 30 years. Romanian Special Forces accepts volunteers between 18 and 42 years old.

- What is assessed in the entry-level medical/physical examination?

The units participating in the research share similar standards regarding the entry-level medical examinations. At this phase, the candidates undergo a complete medical check. The basic medical requirement for every military unit is that the candidates have to be in good physical condition, with a healthy body and mind. An additional condition during the screening process for the studied SOF units is that the candidates for Special Forces operators have to meet the Airborne medical standards.

- What are the requirements for military volunteers?

As mentioned previously, even the military volunteers are not the only allowed candidates for most of the studied NATO SOF units. This is the most preferred source for professional staff. From the previous questions, it became clear that there is no different requirement between the military and civilian candidates. For the military candidates applying for the SOF units in this research, the more experienced the candidate is, and the more abundant the CV, the better his or her chance to join the unit. Some of the units have

additional requirements for their military candidates. The Norwegian MJK allows candidates to apply for the operational units only after completion of the 12-month mandatory conscript service. The German KSK accepts military personnel with a minimum rank of staff sergeant (OR-6).

- What is considered in the background investigation?

In general, the administrative screening is mandatory for candidates for service in the armed forces of all NATO countries. One of the basic requirements concerns citizenship. Every SOF unit in the study requires citizenship in the respective country, except the Belgian Special Forces Group. Not only Belgians but also candidates with European Union citizenship can apply for that unit. Nevertheless, because of the specifics of the SOF units—often working with sensitive classified information—there is an additional requirement for SOF applicants. In addition to having clear criminal records, the candidates for the SOF units must undergo investigation by Intelligence services to obtain a different level of Secret clearance, as follows:

- Belgian Special Forces Group — “NATO Secret”
- Czech Republic 601st Special Forces Group — “NATO Secret”
- Dutch SF — “NATO Top Secret”
- Norwegian MJK — “Norwegian Secret” and “NATO Secret”
- Polish GROM — “NATO Top Secret”

- What are the minimum standards for the physical fitness of candidates?

An important indicator and part of the screening process that could predict the potential of the candidates for every SOF unit is the physical fitness test. Some of the SOF units have a standard conventional military fitness test, the same as the rest of the armed forces in that country, including the German KSK; however, although the Czech Republic 601st Special Forces Group is using the standard physical fitness test, the results must be



“Excellent” before a candidate can continue to the next stage. The minimum physical fitness standards used during the pre-selection phase by the other units include:

Danish SF: “Cooper test”—running 2,800 m in 12 minutes, followed by a split of squats (three sets of 15 repetitions carrying 20 kg of weight); dips (three sets of five repetitions); pull-ups (three sets of five repetitions); and burpees (35 repetitions).

Dutch SF: “Cooper test”—running 2,800 m in 12 minutes; push-ups (minimum 30 repetitions in two minutes—without rest or pause); sit-ups (40 repetitions in two minutes—without rest or pause); straight pull-ups (minimum six repetitions, well-executed); swimming tests: with and without clothes/weapon.

Norwegian MJK: running 5,000 m in less than 25 minutes; pull-ups (eight repetitions); sit-ups (from hanging upside down: 14 repetitions); push-ups (45 repetitions); marching/hiking (15 km with 20 kg backpack and weapon in less than 2.5 hours); swimming (400 meters for less than ten minutes); sub-surface swimming (25 meters—pass/fail).

Polish GROM: push-ups, pull-ups, and swimming. The candidates need to do as many as possible to have a better chance to qualify for the next phase.

- What personal qualities are assessed during screening/pre-selection?

There are many personal qualities that the SOF personnel need to possess to better fit Special Forces training, missions, and the organization, including loyalty, leadership, courage, creativity, motivation, determination, emotional stability, adaptability, autonomy, etc. The screening is conducted by a selection board as well as a team of psychologists. The candidates for the studied NATO SOF units undergo different but comprehensive testing for finding out these traits in the personality profile. For example:

The Belgian Special Forces Group is looking for its candidates to be loyal towards the unit and the Special Forces community, but at the same time, candidates must be able to cheat without compromising, when a situation dictates.

The Danish Special Forces are looking for people who are mentally and physically strong, adaptable, and who have solid motivation.

During a multidiscipline screening, the candidates for the Dutch Special Forces must satisfy the core values of the unit: courage, loyalty, policy, pride, and honor.

The Norwegian MJK is using team-oriented events to find out the traits of the candidates. Besides a team player, the candidate has to be creative—to think outside the “box.” At the same time, he always must evaluate the situation and do a risk assessment—everything is allowed until he is caught. Moreover, he needs to be active and take initiative during the process. What is not assessed as negative traits during that process are the lack of leadership and lack of patriotism.

- What is the unit/cadre that runs the selection course?

All of the studied NATO SOF units, except the Norwegian MJK, have permanent, dedicated training units who run the selection process and the qualification course for the new candidates. At the same time, a temporary selection cadre and psychologists are assigned to support the process in some of them. The Dutch Special Forces is using a rotational system within their Defense organization, so the cadre for the selection process rotates every two or three years. For the Norwegian MJK, only Special Forces operators from the unit are allowed to take part in the selection process of the candidates. As a part of their career development, instructors from assault squadrons rotate into the training unit during the selection process.

- How are the cadre for the selection course chosen?

As a tradition in the SOF units, the selection and training cadre are selected from among the most experienced Special Forces operators. All of the studied NATO SOF units are using this principle for choosing the cadre from which to select candidates. The cadre members are selected based on their traits. Former Special Forces operators—officers and NCOs—with operational/combat experience are the common choice to select and train people for the SOF units. During their functional service duration, the selection cadre in the Dutch Special Forces undergoes proper education and training to become subject-matter experts. Besides selection training, the Norwegian MJK uses the lessons learned

from senior experienced instructors, as well as from an official written source—the selection manual.

- What are the standards for successful selection?

The NATO SOF units that participated in the study are determining two types of standards—fixed measurable and subjective selection. The fixed standards are used, without exceptions, to measure candidates' abilities. The SOF units adopt a system of rigorous standards without adjusting (lowering) them to the current needs for personnel of the unit. The main principle in Dutch Special Forces, based on the core values of the unit, is “The quality is more important than the quantity.” Along with the fixed standards, there is always a subjective factor when selecting personnel. Personal traits are hard to measure but they are taking a big part of the selection process for SOF units. The experience and the subjective opinion of the training cadre are always considered.

- What is the selection process?

The selection process is an integral part of every respected SOF unit. As mentioned earlier, every NATO SOF unit participating in this study has its selection process for finding personnel for Special Forces operational units. The SFAS processes among the SOF units are adapted according to the kind of people they are looking for, and vary in duration and content.

The Belgian Special Forces Group conducts SFAS once per year. The duration of the screening/pre-selection and selection is one month (in November), with the primary purpose to eliminate those candidates who do not possess the right profile. The qualification course (Q-course), conducted for six months (January–June), is composed of three phases: Phase I: six weeks—the purpose is to evaluate the individual capabilities of the candidate, including single-man night land navigation (fully operational with 45 kg of equipment), twice a week. Additionally, besides being subjected to sleep deprivation, the candidates have to pass memorization tests, shooting tests, a physical fitness test, etc. Phase II: four weeks—technical phase—the candidate has to learn all Special Forces techniques,

tactics, and procedures (TTP), how to use Special Forces equipment like communications means to successfully execute Special Forces missions during phase III. Phase III: 15 weeks—executing SOF missions in teams of six to eight team members.

After the initial screening, the candidates for the Czech Republic 601st Special Forces continue with one week of tests focused on psychological resistance, team-work under sleep deprivation, and physical pressure; the process continues with psychological screening and testing.

Danish Special Forces conducts the selection and training process for 43 weeks, divided into four phases. The candidates have to successfully pass every phase to continue on the next module. The four phases include: Special Forces basics (screening/pre-selection); Selection phase (SFAS); Special Forces Qualifications (Q-course); and Special Forces Advanced/Specialist training.

The German KSK conducts selection of personnel twice a year. All applicants undergo the selection process, which consists of three phases: Phase I: one week of general selection, including physical fitness tests, computerized adaptive testing (CAT), psychological tests, etc. Before the second phase the candidates conduct ten weeks of training and preparation. There is phase II, so-called “Hell week,” where the physics of the body and the mental resilience of the candidates are tested; and there is phase III (only for officers): two days (one weekend) designated for testing the officers directly after “Hell week.”

The Dutch Special Forces selection and assessment process is carried out once or twice a year and consists of four phases. Phase I: Introduction Days (for 3–4 days). The goals are 1) “the candidate to gets a realistic idea of the training program and what it means to be a Special Operations Commando;” 2) “the candidate is tested extensively for physical and mental fitness by physiologists and psychologists.”<sup>54</sup> Civilian candidates have to stay an additional day for extra psychological assessment. Phase II: General Airmobile Military Training—for 17 weeks. Phase III: Introductory Training—for eight weeks. During that

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<sup>54</sup> “Factbook Korps Commandotroepen: Past-Present-Future” (Amsterdam: Royal Netherlands Army, 2014), 13. <https://www.korpscommandotroepen.nl/werving/loopbaan-kct/>.

phase, the candidates develop the basic military skills and undergo an extensive physical training program to prepare them for the Initial Commando Course. Phase IV: Initial Commando Course—for eight weeks. During that phase, the selection team assesses whether the candidate has what it takes to be a commando—a Special Forces operator. With little rest, the candidate has to push himself to his limit, both physically and mentally.

After the screening process, the Norwegian MJK conducts SFAS in two phases: Phase I: Negative selection that continues for 4 to 5 weeks. The primary purpose of that phase is to screen out those candidates who are not suitable for the unit's requirements by imposing different types of physical and mental stress; Phase II: Positive selection—approximately one year. The candidates are exposed to tests in order to be qualified for further training by passing each test. The phase is separated into field training, CQB training, winter training (field training during winter circumstances), and dive school.

The Polish “GROM” conducts selection and assessment process consisting of the following phases: Phase I: 72 hours—physical and psychological selection, including sleep deprivation and elements of urban climbing; Phase II: 12–15 months of basic Q-course for Special Forces operators.

Once per year, the Romanian Special Forces conducts a three-phase SFAS process for finding the right personnel for the unit. The phases include a total of 17 days for individual assessment, land navigation, and team events.

- Once personnel are selected, do they directly join the unit, or do they take further training?

After successfully completing the pre-selection and selection process, the candidates for most of the studied NATO SOF units undergo additional qualification training before they join the operational units.

The candidates for Belgian Special Forces Group continue their Special Forces qualification for 1.5 years with specialized courses. Every candidate undergoes some mandatory courses, including Counterterrorism Course; Close Protection Course; and Operational Free Fall. After the general mandatory courses, the new team members start

the specialization training where the operators will be specialized in breaching, communications, sniper shooting, very high altitude free fall, first climber, combat diver, etc.

The candidates for Czech Republic 601st Special Forces Group continue with a year-long Q-course. The qualification training is focused on Special Forces basic tactical knowledge, shooting, airborne training, survival training, basic CQB. The purpose of the Q-course is to train all new operators to the same basic Special Forces level.

In the Danish Special Forces, successful completion of the Special Forces Advance/Specialist module is considered the final criterion before the candidates directly join the teams.

After the SFAS, the German KSK requires the candidates to complete two years of qualification training before they join the operational units.

The candidates for the Dutch Special Forces conduct a 45-week Advanced Commando Course after the Initial Commando Course, where the operators learn special skills and perform under great pressure. The program is divided into modules, such as Basic Military Free-Fall Course; Mountains Operations; Waterborne Operations; Special Operations in Urban Terrain; Vehicle Operations; Special Shooting Training; Helicopter Operations; Combat Life Saver. The longest of the modules is that of the specializations, including Demolition, Communications, Sniper, and Medic. After completing all modules, the candidate has become a Special Operations Commando and joins one of the operational companies.

In the Norwegian MJK, after completing the SFAS and specialized training, the new operators directly join the unit and start training along with the experienced operators.

The candidates for Romanian SF, after passing the selection process, go straight to training as part of the operational units.

- How long are selected personnel required to serve in the unit?

The NATO SOF units participating in the study have either different or no requirements for their personnel to serve in the units. Although the requirement is for

service and signed contracts, the lack of motivation for service and poor performance in the SOF units could determine the termination of the contract and dismissal of the operator.

Belgian Special Forces Group, along with the Danish Special Forces and the Polish GROM, are the SOF units that do not have such a requirement for its personnel for a certain period of service once they join the unit.

In the Czech Republic 601st Special Forces Group, after successful completion of the Q-course, the new operators sign a contract for seven years of service in the unit.

The German KSK has a requirement toward the selected personnel to serve a minimum of six years in the unit.

In the Dutch Special Forces, after completing SFAS and Special Forces qualification training, the selected personnel are required to serve in the unit for a minimum of two years.

The Norwegian MJK issues its personnel two types of contracts: the first allows a Special Forces operator to serve up to the age of 35 years, and the contract can be extended up to the age of 38; second, if considered in possession of valuable knowledge, one is given a new contract until retirement (at the age of 60 years).

- How long are selected personnel allowed to serve in the unit?

For most of the NATO SOF units, there are no limitations on the time of service in the unit. Nevertheless, the basic requirement and principles for the Special Forces operators are to meet the operational standards of the unit. For the Dutch SF, the time of service depends on the rank of the person. A promotion system could be beneficial for officers and NCOs to advance in rank, after completion of a proper education required for a certain position. If a promotion is not possible, after 12 years, at the latest, a Special Forces operator will be mediated for a job in civil society. Officer and NCOs from Norwegian MJK and Danish SF, to advance in rank, use another promotional opportunity to apply for positions in the regular army, navy, air force and then can come back to the unit at a later time.

- While serving in the unit, are personnel periodically re-assessed?

The personnel serving in all of the studied NATO SOF units are reassessed annually according to the standards of the unit.

The Dutch Special Forces personnel are continuously assessed. Conversations also take place between leaders and their subordinates to maintain or improve the performance quality (on both sides). If a person does not fit into the team, does not have the right qualities or capabilities, or his personal life no longer matches his professional life, or he does not perform at the required level, etc., the contract will be terminated.

As for the Norwegian MJK, most of the SOF units use annual physical fitness tests for evaluation of the personnel on a regular basis. In addition, they administer various Special Forces operator military tests and annual performance reviews (a written statement by the officer in charge).

In the studied units, besides the already mentioned reasons for unsatisfactory performance, SOF personnel could be involuntarily dismissed for other reasons, including loss of security clearance, criminal activity, DUI, and unprofessional behavior.

- How are non-selected personnel managed?

Since the participating units in this research are taking under consideration civilian and military volunteers applying for Special Forces selection process, there two different options for the two types of candidates. Civilians are returned to civilian society (as in Dutch SF) or, if they want to, they could apply to another conventional military unit. In most of the NATO countries' the home base of the studied SOF units, there is an arrangement whereby the military personnel who do not successfully complete the SFAS or Q-course can return to their original units of assignment. Depending on the reason for their disqualification during the process and the instructors' opinion, as in the Norwegian MJK practice, the candidate may apply for selection again. Another option, as is the case for the Czech Republic 601st Special Forces Group, allows the unsuccessful candidates for Special Forces operator to serve in staff or logistic support units if they pass certain requirements for those units and positions.



The summarized answers from the interviews conducted with NATO SOF representatives additionally widen knowledge about the Special Forces selection process in NATO SOF units. From the results, based on the answers of the interviews, it can be concluded that all SOF units participating in the research have a dedicated selection process for their personnel applying for the operational units. The answers demonstrate only slight differences in the process of SFAS among the SOF units; however, all of the studied NATO SOF units share general basic requirements for the candidates, common principles for selecting Special Forces personnel, and selection phases that the perspective Special Forces operators must successfully complete before they join the operational units.

## **V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **A. BACKGROUND**

The purpose of the study was to examine the experience of the U.S. and other NATO Army Special Forces in the process of Special Forces assessment and selection in order to outline the profile and the desired qualities of prospective Special Forces personnel for developing a new assessment and selection process for the BJSOCOM. To answer the research question of how the BJSOCOM can develop a new SFAS process for finding the right personnel, drawing from the experience of the U.S. and other NATO SOF, a three-step research approach was taken. First, the information concerning the SFAS—its history and the requirements for modern-day SFAS—was analyzed in the existing literature. Second, the research examined the current selection/testing process in the BUSOF to answer the question of whether that process meets the standards for the NATO Special Forces personnel admission process. Third, the author conducted a survey in the form of interviews with the available NATO SOF representatives from different countries who are currently serving at the United States Special Operations Command. The survey revealed and compared the missions, identified the individual personnel requirements pertaining to the respective countries' screening and selection processes, and the units' service requirements in the post-selection period. The survey also identified what elements of the selection processes different countries share, and what kind of people and what qualities they are looking for during the SFAS before the candidates are accepted into a SOF unit.

### **B. CONCLUSIONS**

For every SOF unit, the high quality of its personnel is its most valuable resource. The SFAS process, by nature, is designed not only to eliminate Special Forces candidates who do not possess the “right stuff,”<sup>55</sup> but also to find the most suitable soldiers, NCOs, officers, or civilian volunteers for further investment in their follow-on Special Forces qualification training. The research conducted for this study, once again confirms and

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<sup>55</sup> Clancy and Grisham, *Special Forces: A Guided Tour of U.S. Army Special Forces*, 75.

defends the claim that it is important and necessary for volunteers for any Special Forces units to undergo an SFAS process that tests their body and mental toughness.

The analysis of the reviewed literature, including major publications about Special Forces, to a lesser or greater extent, shaped the overall picture of the assessment and selection process. Furthermore, the literature described the importance of implementation of the SFAS process as one of the major characteristics of the Special Forces units directly linked to the sole responsibility of their missions. In most of the written sources, when describing the requirements for finding the right individuals for the modern SOF challenges, the authors look back to the lessons learned from history, which demonstrates the close connection between the principles used during the early OSS assessment and selection that are still relevant today to a great extent.

In the study, the need for developing a new SFAS process for the BUSOF was evidenced after an analysis of the current admission process. The analysis demonstrated that the existing process is not a specialized SFAS designed for the specific needs of the BUSOF, which should look for the best candidates and adhere to the high standards used by most of the NATO SOF units. Instead, the basic requirements are almost the same as for every other military branch of service or unit within the BAF. Moreover, the existing requirements apply only to civilian candidates. The study revealed a significant mismatch between, on one hand, the requirements and the level of the testing standards during the admission process, and on another hand, the high-level responsibility and the high-value missions of the BUSOF, as part of the family of the NATO SOF units. Furthermore, the current admission process for BUSOF differs significantly from the rest of the NATO SOF units, which is not only an indicator of the likelihood of a lower quality of the personnel but also a prerequisite for a possible risk to interoperability and meeting the NATO SOF mission standards.

The interviews conducted with NATO SOF representatives were the main focus of the study. The results, based on the answers of the interviews, demonstrated that all of the countries participating in the research have a dedicated SFAS process for their SOF units. From the results it could be concluded that even though there are slight differences between the processes in the different units, they share common principles for selecting the right

people for the elite SOF units. Among these principles are the following: using standards for screening and selecting personnel, as part of the tradition and Special Forces culture of the units; all candidates for the SOF operational units—civilian and military—are subject to the process of pre-selection and selection; all applicants, civilian and military, undergo continuous rigorous physical and mental assessment and ability testing; and probably the most important, all types of candidates are welcome to apply (in most of the European-based NATO SOF units), but during the process of finding the most capable candidates, the chosen are few—for SOF units, as a leading principle, the quality is always more important than the quantity. From the results of the literature review, the analysis of the current admission process in the BUSOF, and the research among other NATO SOF units, it is obvious that an indisputable gap exists between the SFAS process in BUSOF and the one used by a majority of the leading NATO SOF countries. The current SFAS process at BUSOF needs to be modified by providing basic principles and policy recommendations for further improvements for finding quality Special Forces personnel.

### **C. RECOMMENDATIONS**

Now that BJSOCOM has been created, the next step is developing a real assessment-and-selection program for the future candidates in order to increase the quality and capabilities not only of the Special Forces personnel but also of the unit. For the BJSOCOM leadership the crucial first step to solve the problem is to realize that there is a problem with the quality personnel in the operational units. The only solution for this problem must be creating an entirely new admission process, namely SFAS, for the future volunteers—soldiers, NCOs, officers, and civilian “off the street” candidates. The SFAS for BUSOF has to identify candidates who are suitable for further Special Forces training, who would “perform effectively in an unpredictable, adverse and hostile environment, and who will be dedicated to their profession.”<sup>56</sup> The new SFAS process that BUSOF must adopt needs to assess not only the candidate’s inherent capabilities but also his or her trainability and suitability for service in the operational Special Forces unit.<sup>57</sup> It takes years

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<sup>56</sup> Velky, “Special Forces Assessment and Selection,” 14.

<sup>57</sup> Marrs, “SFAS Redesign: An Essential Evolution,” 2.

and too many financial resources to create a professional Special Forces soldier. With insufficient resources—both financial and material, as well as training time—at its disposal, the BJSOCOM needs to find the most “cost-effective process for manning the force and placing the right soldier for the right job.”<sup>58</sup>

In a time of changes in the Bulgarian Joint Special Operation Command, it should create and develop over the years a Bulgarian equivalent of the SFAS process for the future volunteers, a process that has been used by all of the NATO SOF units for years. The recommendations, based on the research that has been conducted in this study, refer to improvement in three important directions—recruitment, pre-selection, and assessment and selection of the personnel for the BUSOF.

### **1. Recruitment**

As part of the Bulgarian Armed Forces, BUSOF are experiencing recruiting problems and a lack of constant flow of both civilian and military volunteers for several reasons. First, different socio-economic reasons make the military service less attractive for young people in the Republic of Bulgaria, in general. Next, the senior military leadership demonstrates a lack of understanding of the important role of the SOF units (in particular BUSOF) as well as their need to find quality personnel, which determines the lack of support from the rest of the conventional branches in the BAF. Lastly, the clumsy legislation does not give military candidates the opportunity to apply and then return to their original units if they are dropped from SFAS.

The Law on Defense and Armed Forces of the Republic of Bulgaria should be changed in order to allow officers, NCOs, and soldiers from other branches of service within BAF to have an opportunity to apply for the operational units in BUSOF and, in case they do not succeed, to return to their original units. After the applicant meets all the conditions required at entrance, the next step on the path for the ranks of BUSOF is successfully passing the pre-selection process.

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<sup>58</sup> Thomas M. Carlin and Mike Sanders, “Soldier of the Future: Assessment and Selection of Force XXI,” *Special Warfare* 9, no. 2 (May 1996): 16.

## **2. Pre-selection**

Before being admitted to the SFAS process, a candidate for BUSOF has to pass the requirements for the pre-selection or screening process. The main goal of the pre-selection phase is to screen out the candidates who do not possess the right profile and who do not have the potential for further selection and training for the needs of the SOF units. The current screening process, which tests only the civilian candidates, includes medical and psychological examinations—the “Comprehensive Intelligence Test” and the “Unified Armed Forces Physical-Fitness Test”—and an interview with the candidate. The BJSOCOM should screen in any intelligent, medically, mentally, and physically fit candidates, who exceed the average required level for conventional units in BAF. Besides covering the airborne medical standards and psychological exams, the current length of this phase is two days—for conducting the physical fitness and intelligence tests, which is enough for the basic testing at the entrance.

For its future personnel, it would be appropriate if the BJSOCOM improves the screening process in two ways. On one hand, since the current standards are too low, the admission standards have to be increased and fixed for all candidates; on another hand, not only the civilians, but every applicant for the operational units—officers, NCOs, soldiers, and civilian candidates—should undergo the screening process. The screening standards for BUSOF have to be strengthened or must differ from those for the conventional military units in order to screen out the candidates early on who are not prepared physically and who are not motivated enough to continue in SFAS. Therefore, either the current standards for the physical fitness test have to increase, for the needs of BUSOF, or a new test has to be designed. The current requirements allow applicants to be accepted as Special Forces operators in BUSOF, depending on their age and gender,<sup>59</sup> even though they score a total of a minimum of 200 out of a maximum of 400 points on the “Unified Armed Forces Physical-Fitness Test” and a minimum of 30 out of 100 points on a separate component, which does not demonstrate superb physical condition. The BJSOCOM should increase

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<sup>59</sup> There are different physical training standards for males and females, according to the “Program for Physical Training and Sport in the Armed Forces of the Republic of Bulgaria.” In addition, the required standards are lowered for older candidates.

the pre-selection physical fitness test standards for its applicants: for a separate component minimum of 50 points and a total of a minimum of 250 points. Additionally, the physical fitness standards should be fixed for all applicants, without taking into consideration age and gender in the “Program for Physical Training and Sport in the Armed Forces of the Republic of Bulgaria”; the SOF missions are not separated by age or gender, and in the Special Forces teams everyone is equally participating when executing a combat mission.

Currently, the required results from the “Comprehensive Intelligence Test,” a minimum of 40 points out of 100, is not enough to demonstrate the general knowledge of a Special Forces candidate. The required intelligence test standards must be above the average for the BAF, and should be increased to a minimum of 60 points to guarantee a greater chance for finding the right people with the necessary intellectual capacity for future BUSOF operators. Because there should be a difference in the screening standards between the candidates for the conventional military units and BUSOF, all candidates—whether they are military or civilian—should meet the pre-selection requirements. Once the candidates meet the increased screening standards for BUSOF, they should be eligible to continue to SFAS.

### **3. Assessment and Selection**

The Special Forces soldier is a unique warrior who is hard to find, “the requirements of this special individual are [and should be] like no other military professional,” and “once found, [he or she] must be rigorously trained and tested.”<sup>60</sup> The BJSOCOM must formulate desirable, specific for BUSOF, traits, attributes, and methods for measuring the desired qualities and evaluation of the candidates suitable for Special Forces training.<sup>61</sup> A recent publication about the U.S. SOF determines that “their soldier would be more successful if they possess the following attributes: Organizational skills; Trainability; Situational awareness; Ability to make complex discriminations and decisions; Personal adaptability; Resistance to stress; Dependability, determination, and stability; and Physical endurance

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<sup>60</sup> Couch, *Chosen Soldier: The Making of Special Forces Warrior*, 5.

<sup>61</sup> Velky, “Special Forces Assessment and Selection,” 13.

and specialized military skills.”<sup>62</sup> Because the core Special Forces missions among all NATO SOF are the same, as shown in the research, it could be concluded that the desired attributes for prospective NATO SOF personnel should not differ in principle. The recommendation is that the BJSOCOM should determine these attributes that could predict and contribute to the success of the candidates in follow-on Special Forces training and fit the BUSOF organizational requirements.

Additional recommendations for improvement of the current admission process are provided, in the form of asking questions and answering these questions, using the collected and analyzed information in the study.

How long should the SFAS process be for the candidates for Special Forces operators in the BUSOF?

The conducted research among the NATO SOF units shows that SFAS processes are adapted according to what kind of people they are looking for and vary in duration and content. Based on the current situation in the BAF, including the recruitment challenges, as well as time and resources available, it is realistic to propose the duration of the SFAS for the BUSOF candidates to be no longer than between 14 to 16 days.

Where should the SFAS process for the BUSOF candidates be carried out?

The assessment and selection process should be carried out at a remote site, without interaction with the outside world. The BUSOF specialized training area “Tsruncha” meets these criteria. The environment at the training site provides all necessary living, training, and testing requirements for running an SFAS process. Furthermore, the BUSOF training area would give an opportunity for the assessment and selection staff and the psychologists to obtain in-depth knowledge of the candidates’ abilities and personalities.<sup>63</sup>

How could the SFAS process be designed?

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<sup>62</sup> Carlin and Sanders, “Soldier of the Future: Assessment and Selection of Force XXI,” 17.

<sup>63</sup> Erdal Kenar, “Assessment and Selection of Personnel for the Turkish Special Forces Command” (master’s thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 1998), 55, <http://handle.dtic.mil/100.2/ADA350142>.



The SFAS mission is to assess the Special Forces soldier's potential for being independent, as well as to be a team player and a leader.<sup>64</sup> That is why in the new SFAS process for BUSOF it is essential to have a comprehensive and multidisciplinary individual assessment that ensures selecting a person who can act as part of a group/team, where the candidates would try to meet the standards, criteria, and objectives established in advance with the support of an effective measurement methodology. There are measurable performance standards in the form of time (for marches, running, swimming, obstacle course, etc.), points for results from marksmanship and written tests, as well as subjective non-measurable standards—the level of performance effort, motivation, and leadership during the training exercises.<sup>65</sup>

For a two-week SFAS process, all types of candidates who want to join the BUSOF operational units should be considered, without exceptions, including males and females, civilians, and all ranks military. During the first part/week of the SFAS, the individual assessment has to test the autonomy or the individual capabilities of the candidates. In this period, stress-related events, such as day and night long-distance marches carrying heavy rucksacks, going through water obstacles, managing fear of heights, water, darkness, and confined spaces, sleep-deprivation, etc., should assess the fittest candidates, their individual motivation, and physical and psychological abilities.

The second part/week should assess how the candidates are functioning as part of a group/team and their ability to work with others—an environment of different personalities. During team-oriented events, the candidates should perform tasks that come in the form of physically challenging, team-centric movements that put a premium on leadership and followership, organization, and teamwork.<sup>66</sup> The selection staff should create field team events, such as finding the best option for moving heavy objects for long distances, where the candidates would be tested for functioning as part of an operational

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<sup>64</sup> Velky, "Special Forces Assessment and Selection," 14.

<sup>65</sup> Couch, *Chosen Soldier: The Making of Special Forces Warrior*, 112.

<sup>66</sup> Couch, 135.

team. Besides being a team player, the candidate has to be creative—to think outside the “box”—which are critical qualities for every SOf unit.

Who is appropriate to run the SFAS process?

For the purpose of SFAS, the BUSOF should create permanent subject-matter experts responsible for conducting the assessments and selection—such as the cadre, selection board, and military psychologists—who have to undergo a proper SFAS training. Since the current selection/testing and qualification training is being done by the BUSOFs’ Training Center staff with additionally appointed officers and NCOs, it would be appropriate for the cadre who would run the SFAS to be from the same unit. However, this training staff—responsible for teaching, testing, and mentoring—has to be qualified for selecting personnel because the quality of the future BUSOF warriors would be in their hands.<sup>67</sup> The cadre’s proficiency in selecting the right people defines the effectiveness of their Special Forces training, the quality of the personnel, and last but not least, maintaining the traditions and culture of the Bulgarian SOf. Because the personnel needs of the BUSOF do not allow a permanent flow of recruits for the combat units, a permanent selection board is not necessary. It would come together whenever there is an admission for recruits. Because there are not enough military psychologists permanently assigned to the BJSOCOM, a group of military psychologists from the Center for Mental Health and Prevention at the Bulgarian Military Medical Academy could be temporarily deployed when an SFAS is conducted in order to support the psychological assessment of the candidates. Yet, additional training in selecting personnel with the right psychological profile specifically for BUSOF is required.

Those worthy candidates who overcome the challenges of SFAS phase would continue to the next phase of SFQC, with emphasis on their further Special Forces qualification as well as MOS training. At this phase, the assessment and selection of the trainees’ performance should go on but they should be supported and encouraged by all means to learn how to become proficient Special Forces warriors from the BUSOF.

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<sup>67</sup> Couch, 42.

The proposed SFAS process is designed to assess the overall performance of the candidates for the Special Forces operational units and select the right and most suitable among them to ensure the quality of the most precious resource—the personnel of BUSOF. Once established, the SFAS process should be maintained, developed, and adapted with the constantly changing and complicated security environment. At no point should the quality and standards at the entry of the BUSOF be compromised in order to increase the number of Special Forces personnel—again, the quality is more important than quantity. Keeping high selection standards is the only way to ensure high-quality personnel for BJSOCOM, which is necessary for the follow-on qualification and advanced professional Special Forces training. Finding and investing in the right people will increase the combat effectiveness and the interoperability of the BUSOF with partnering NATO SOF, as well as collective defense commitments, by providing highly suitable officers, NCOs, and soldiers for the operational units of the Bulgarian Joint Special Operation Command.

## APPENDIX A. INTERVIEW WITH MAJ JOEL GENARD

### GENERAL

*What is the nationality and designation/name of the unit?*

Belgian Special Forces Group—SF Gp

*Is the unit considered or designated a “special operations” unit?*

Considered as TIER ONE of Belgian, yes

*What are the missions of the unit?*

Military Assistance, Direct Actions, Special Reconnaissance; Close protection in high risk environment, Non Combatant Evacuation Operations

*What is the number and what are the various military specialties of the unit (ODA) members?*

Six-member team—Commander, Adjunct (Intel specialist at the same time), Sniper, Medic, JTAC, Breacher, Communications Specialist, Shooting Instructor. So some members have more than ONE specialty.

*How are personnel recruited or assigned to be candidates for the unit?*

We welcome ANYONE willing to join, Defense wide, even from the civilian population and other countries to come and join us. We would need about 50 candidates per year to expect 10 new operators to replace an average of 8 operators leaving per year, and keep trying to expand a little bit year after year.

*Does the unit have a selection process for its recruited or assigned personnel?*

Our unit organizes its own selection (one month) and organizes its own Qualification course (6 months)—followed by 1.5 years of mandatory courses during which the candidate might be disqualified if he doesn't meet the requirements.

## SCREENING/PRE-SELECTION

*What categories of candidates are considered for selection to the unit?*

All types, even women are welcomed.

*If women are considered for selection to the unit, for what positions?*

Yes, any positions for which they would succeed.

*Are there any differences in screening and selection requirements for any categories of candidates?*

Not any difference, the rank is forgotten and not considered, everyone is at the same level "Potential candidate."

*What are the entry-level requirements for candidates?*

Must be fluent in French or Dutch. Must know the basics in the other national language (Dutch or French) and must know basics of English. European citizenship (not only Belgian), no criminal records, medical qualification to airborne units.

*What is assessed in the entry-level medical/physical examination? What are the minimum standards?*

Medical entry-level: pass the medical examinations to the airborne units

*What are the requirements for military volunteers?*

We used to require a minimum eight years in service. Due to the lack of personnel, we stopped requiring anything anymore. Everyone is most welcome to try to pass the selection and hopefully finish successfully the Q-course.

*What is considered in the background investigation?*

They must have a NATO Secret clearance or be in the position to get one. Therefore, they are investigated by the Intelligence Service.

*What are the minimum standards for the physical fitness of candidates?*

I'll send you another document as soon as I receive it from the Training Cell.

*What personal qualities are assessed during screening/pre-selection?*

Honesty towards his comrades but he must be able to cheat, be an outlaw in a certain way to pass. A SOF Operator must feel comfortable lying to a police officer at a checkpoint in a war area, saying that he has no weapons even though his vehicle is full of hidden weapons and he has no real visa to be allowed in that country. But his team members and his unit must trust him 100%. This is one thing we are trying to assess.

So a candidate unfit for the conventional military could be a perfect match for us. They have to pass some intelligence tests involving a lack of sleep (memorization, understanding, recognition of military targets, etc.)

## **SELECTION**

*What is the unit/cadre that runs the selection course?*

The Special Forces Group runs the pre-selection and the Q-course. We have a full-time cell dedicated to Q-course, supported by a team (temporary). It is five months preparation and seven months execution (pre-selection is one month, Q-course is six months)

*How are the cadre for the selection course chosen? —What experience do they have, or what training do they receive to conduct selection?*

The cadre for the selection are former good operators with a minimum four years of experiences in teams.

*What are the standards for successful selection?*

So far, we are trying hard not to lower the standards. But we give second chances and we try to train the candidates to pass. But due to the lack of personnel, we are investigating other ways and thinking about lowering the standards.

*What is the selection process?*

Once year, a pre-selection of one month (November). The goal is to eliminate those who are obviously not the right profile and train the best we can those with good potential.

The Q-course goes from January to June and is composed of three phases.

Phase 1: Six weeks—evaluate the candidate while working alone—map reading dropping with 45 Kg equipment (fully operational) at night, alone without being seen, twice a week. If the candidate misses the two droppings he has a second chance during the weekend. He must learn a lot during the day even if he didn't sleep at night and has to pass memorization tests, shooting tests, physical tests, etc.

Phase 2: Four weeks—technical phase—the candidate has to learn all the needed tactics and technics—how to use his equipment—communications means in order to execute SOF missions for phase 3.

Phase 3: 15 weeks—executing SOF missions in teams of six to eight persons.

## **POST-SELECTION**

*Once personnel are selected, do they directly join the unit, or do they take further training?*

They go on following mandatory courses for 1.5 years—four months Counterterrorist course—Close Protection Course—Operational Free Fall ... same for all the operators

Then they start the specialization; only some operators will be specialized as Breacher, Coms, Sniping, Very High Altitude Free Fall, First Climber, Combat Diver, etc.

*How long are selected personnel required to serve in the unit?*

There is no specific limit but we hope they'll stay at least five years. But it's not really possible to force an operator to stay if he doesn't want to anymore.

*How long are selected personnel allowed to serve in the unit?—Is there a rotation plan to return unit personnel to the regular armed forces, then back to the unit?*

The longer they serve the better. Typically, after serving in the teams, they are welcome at the Special Forces Center of Excellence as instructors. Then they are welcome to serve in supporting teams and finally at the staff. We try to keep the operators inside Special Forces Group as long as possible.

While serving in the unit, are personnel periodically re-assessed?—On what basis might selected personnel be involuntarily re-assigned or dismissed from the unit?

The chief of the Operational detachment, after advice from team leaders, can propose to dismiss a candidate to the CO. If he doesn't fit the profile, we try to find the best fit for that person somewhere inside the unit. And in extreme cases, he will be offered a position out of the unit.

*How are non-selected personnel managed? (For example: returned to original unit; assigned to a new unit; trained for another selection attempt; etc.)*

They are returned to the original units.

## APPENDIX B. INTERVIEW WITH SGM RADEK VAJDECKA

### GENERAL

*What is the nationality and designation/name of the unit?*

601st Special Forces Group, Czech Republic (CZE Tier 1).

The CZE SOF includes CZE SOF Directorate, 601st SFG, CPSS (SOF Combat Support company including Commandos and Tactical INFO Ops), SOATU (dedicated SOF capability choppers under the CZE Air Force).

*Is the unit considered or designated a “special operations” unit?*

Designated

*What are the missions of the unit?*

(The missions are AJP-3.5 CHAPTER 2—ALLIED SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES PRINCIPAL TASKS only, or there are additional; for example: the unit can execute CT missions in the country, execute security operations of HVI, etc.). DA, HRO, SR and MA.

*What is the number and what are the various military specialties of the unit (ODA) members?*

Four-member team with the capability to build task purpose size with specialists (sniper, EOD, 18D, 18F). Basic team involves CDR (O2 or E7), D-CDR (Driver, Sharp Shooter, Medic), Signalist, and Technician (Demolition).

*How are personnel recruited or assigned to be candidates for the unit?—what is the number of personnel required each year to maintain the unit as “mission capable?”*

NCOs are recruited from conventional forces units with two years’ service experience. Officers from conventional forces or from the University of Defense.

*Does the unit have a selection process for its recruited or assigned personnel?*

Unit has a dedicated selection process, which consist with two pipelines. The selection to the squadrons (operators) and qualification for the staff and logistical support elements. There is a difference in the length of the selection process and in physical and mental requirements. There is also a different look from the psychological point of view between officers and NCOs as operators.



## SCREENING/PRE-SELECTION

*What categories of candidates are considered for selection to the unit?*

We take under consideration all candidates. There is an gender-neutral policy. But females have never been successfully selected as an operator. Civilians are not considered for the Tier 1 unit. There is a possibility in Tier 2 unit's selection. Selectees are volunteers. There is not a given task to serve in CZE SOF enterprise.

*If women are considered for selection to the unit, for what positions?*

Open for all positions. But mostly successful for staff and logistic support part.

*Are there any differences in screening and selection requirements for any categories of candidates?*

Differences are in the level of the security screening. Different initial physical and psychological requirements between operators and staff/logistic support.

*What are the entry-level requirements for candidates?*

Standard entry-level requirements: operators must have two years' experience in conventional forces or University of Defense, Czech citizenship, no criminal records, medical qualification to airborne units, knowledge of a foreign language. There is not any policy for the age.

*What is assessed in the entry-level medical/physical examination?—What are the minimum standards?*

Medical entry-level: pass the medical exam for the airborne units required for the operators and selected parts at the staff and logistic support.

*What are the requirements for military volunteers?*

The longer the experience and the more abundant the CV of a candidate, the better. Officer—Bachelor's degree, NCO—middle school as operators. Staff and Logistic support based on the position and rank. Since 2016 a new law when position is chained with rank (education) and salary.

*What is considered in the background investigation?*

All selectees who do not have a Security clearance are screened for the given level of the security screening by the CZE NSA. Operators—NATO Secret. Staff and logistic support based on the position.

*What are the minimum standards for the physical fitness of candidates?*

All candidates have to pass the conventional annual physical test as excellent before they are pushed to the next stage. The basic annual conventional physical test is swim or run, pull-ups or pushups, with sit ups.

*What personal qualities are assessed during screening/pre-selection?*

All mentioned above. Now the screening is multidisciplinary. Hence the screening is conducted by the board of specialists—/i.e., psychologist, sociologists etc.

## **SELECTION**

*What is the unit/cadre that runs the selection course?*

Permanent members of the unit's physical training branch and the unit's psychologists.

*How are the cadre for the selection course chosen? What experience do they have, or what training do they receive to conduct selection?*

The unit's training branch was built by the former operators with combat experience.

*What are the standards for successful selection?—Are the standards fixed, or are the standards adjusted (lowered or increased when necessary) to fill personnel requirements/quotas?*

Since 2006 there is not any change in requirements and standards. Instead requirements were lowered in the conventional army. It causes an increased gap in physical and mental strength between conventional and SOF requirements.

*What is the selection process?*

Selection is divided into Operators and Staff with Logistical support staff. All have the same initial test. It consists of the whole military annual physical test, the results of which have to be excellent, and basic SOF psychological requirements. After a successful initial test, operators continue on for one of week testing, which is focused on psychological resistance, team work under the sleep deprivation, and physical pressure and continues to psychological screening and testing.

## POST-SELECTION

*Once personnel are selected, do they directly join the unit, or do they take further training?*

CZE SOF Operators from the 601st go to a one-year Q-course focused on SOF basic tactical knowledge, shooting, airborne training, survivor, basic CQB. Logisticians and other staff are included in selected weeks of the training. The Q-course is focused on getting all operators to the same basic SOF level from different companies and level of training in conventional forces.

*How long are selected personnel required to serve in the unit?*

If they successfully pass the Q-course, the operator can sign a contract for seven years. It can be continued if beneficial for the military. Education and promotion is a continuous process.

*How long are selected personnel allowed to serve in the unit?—Is there a rotation plan to return unit personnel to the regular armed forces, then back to the unit?*

No limit to serve in the unit. But, it has to be beneficial for the system.

While serving in the unit, are personnel periodically re-assessed?—On what basis might selected personnel be involuntarily re-assigned or dismissed from the unit?

All SOF personnel are assessed annually for physical and psychological fitness, and on military knowledge.

*How are non-selected personnel managed?*

Non-selected personnel are returned to the unit or to other units of the military.

Unsuccessful operators can serve in Staff or Logistic support if they pass the given level requirement for staff/logistic level.

## **APPENDIX C. INTERVIEW WITH CDR SG/DNK EXO MOGENS S. CHRISTENS AND MAJ THOMAS SUNDBY**

### **GENERAL**

*What is the nationality and designation/name of the unit?*

Denmark/Jægerkorpset (Danish Land SOF)

*Is the unit considered or designated a “special operations” unit?*

Yes.

*What are the missions of the unit?*

The missions as described in AJP-3.5 and support to national police (CT operations)

*What is the number and what are the various military specialties of the unit (ODA) members?*

The teams consists of eight operators, including the following roles/functions:

- Team Leader
- Team 2iC/Intel
- JTAC
- Radio/Comms
- Medic (primary)
- Medic (Secondary)/Sniper Observer
- Sniper
- Breachers

*How are personnel recruited or assigned to be candidates for the unit?*

Via their own application. Recruitment takes place both within the defense forces and among civilians. Usually around 10% of applicants go through the entire selection process.

Recruitment from both conventional military and civilian population. Jaegerkorpset approximately 10. Frogman corps 6–8.

*Does the unit have a selection process for its recruited or assigned personnel?*

Yes. All personnel applying for selection go through the same process.

## **SCREENING/PRE-SELECTION**

*What categories of candidates are considered for selection to the unit?*

These are the current minimum requirements to apply for selection (from Jægerkorpset homepage):

As something new, everyone can apply for the Jægerkorpset if they live up to the access requirements, also applicants without a military background. Can be security cleared. You are eligible to obtain a driver's license (may not have driving license revoked at the time of the application). Can pass the physical entry requirements of 1. Selection.

Jaegerkorpset and Frogmancorps: All Danish citizens above 21, both military and civilian. Sirius: Military only

*If women are considered for selection to the unit, for what positions?*

They can apply for any position. So far, no women have been able to become special operators.

*Are there any differences in screening and selection requirements for any categories of candidates?*

No. The selection requirements are the same to all categories of candidates.

*What are the entry-level requirements for candidates?*

Danish citizen. Minimum of 21 years old and less than 31 years is preferred. High school departure test with the minimum grade of 02 or equivalent in the subjects Danish, English, and Mathematics.

*What is assessed in the entry-level medical/physical examination?—What are the minimum standards?*

Good physical condition and good health. Normal hearing. Well-maintained teeth. Visual Requirements. Have visual acuity without correction, determined for each eye separately, without attachment of at least 6/6. The visual acuity can be obtained after refraction surgery with PRK, LASEK, or other method that does not leave stromal flap. Have normal color perception. The test must be done using Ishihara's "Test for Colorblindness Complete Edition." One error reading is allowed. However, a light color blindness can be

accepted if the applicant can pass a lantern test (Holmes / Wright lantern test) administered by an ophthalmologist.

*What are the requirements for military volunteers?*

See list above.

*What is considered in the background investigation?*

See list above. You have to be a Danish citizen. Also, in order to pass security clearance screening all of these things (citizenship; marriage/family; legal/court records; personal finances; etc.) you are investigated and scrutinized.

*What are the minimum standards for the physical fitness of candidates?*

Minimum requirements just to start selection are:

- Running: 2,900 m in 12 minutes;
- Strength: Split squat (3 x 15 reps with 20 kg), dips (3 x 5 reps), pull-ups (3 x 5 reps), burpees (35 reps)

Swimming is not part of the 1. Selection requirements; however, it is a part of the next selection process.

*What personal qualities are assessed during screening/pre-selection?!*

The first and foremost criterion is the psychological/personality profile. From selection homepage: “What we really need is people who have mental strength and solid will. People who are able to overcome their own fears and maintain a view of the big picture. Adaptability, mental and physical strength are the most powerful weapons we have and the trait we train most.”

All three units runs their five-day long test, where all of the above is assessed and evaluated to determine admission to the selection course, where only candidates who have passed the initial physical test participate.

## **SELECTION**

*What is the unit/cadre that runs the selection course?*

The unit responsible for personnel selection is a Permanent Training Wing.

*How are the cadre for the selection course chosen?*

All are former operators selected from the teams.

*What are the standards for successful selection?*

Standards are fixed. There are certain requirements that the candidates *must* pass, but since we're looking for personality traits, part of the selection is also subjective to the training cadre.

*What is the selection process?*

The selection and training process is 43 weeks long, divided into four sections and a candidate has to pass each one to continue on to the next module. The four modules are:

- SOF Basics;
- Selection Module;
- SOF Qualifications;
- SOF Advanced/Specialist

## **POST-SELECTION**

*Once personnel are selected, do they directly join the unit, or do they take further training?*

The SOF Advanced/Specialist module is considered the final criteria to join the teams. After completion of the fourth training phase the new operators join the teams directly.

*How long are selected personnel required to serve in the unit?*

There are no requirements.

*How long are selected personnel allowed to serve in the unit?*

There are no limits. People can stay as long as they can meet the operational requirements. They can also apply for a position in the regular army, navy, air force, and then come back to the unit at a later time.

*While serving in the unit, are personnel periodically re-assessed?*

Yes. They must pass physical requirements on a regular basis. If someone is dismissed from the unit, it is always based on performance. It is processed through the chain of command.

*How are non-selected personnel managed?*

Usually they return to their original unit or civilian life. Depending on why they are de-selected they *may* apply for selection again. It is assessed on an individual basis in each case.



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## **APPENDIX D. INTERVIEW WITH LTC OLIVER BARTH**

### **GENERAL**

*What is the nationality and designation/name of the unit?*

Kommando Spezialkräfte (KSK—German Army SOF)

*Is the unit considered or designated a “special operations” unit?*

Yes.

*What are the missions of the unit?*

(The missions are AJP-3.5 CHAPTER 2—ALLIED SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES PRINCIPAL TASKS only, or there are additional; for example: the unit can execute CT missions in the country, execute security operations of HVI, etc.)

SR, Force Protection, HRO, Capture/High Risk Arrest, CT, Deep Ops, Covert Ops, MA.

*What is the number and what are the various military specialties of the unit (ODA) members?*

Team consists of four members (Signal, Weapon, Medic, Demolitions)

*How are personnel recruited or assigned to be candidates for the unit? What is the number of personnel required each year to maintain the unit as “mission capable?”*

From armed forces. And via cadet system (civilians entering the armed forces).

*Does the unit have a selection process for its recruited or assigned personnel?*

Yes.

### **SCREENING/PRE-SELECTION**

*What categories of candidates are considered for selection to the unit?*

No exclusions.

*If women are considered for selection to the unit, for what positions?*

Yes.

At this time no woman has passed the selection to become a trooper. Nevertheless, we also have a special selection for women who want to join the reconnaissance unit (one year)

*Are there any differences in screening and selection requirements for any categories of candidates?*

In general – no differences. Only officers have an additional part for selection.

*What are the entry-level requirements for candidates?*

German citizenship, no criminal record, medical qualification. For the selection, no further requirements. If they want to join after being selected, the minimum rank is sergeant. That means they have to go to NCO school before.

*What is assessed in the entry-level medical/physical examination?*

Medical standard to become airborne qualified.

*What are the requirements for military volunteers?*

No conscript, minimum staff sergeant (OR-6).

*What is considered in the background investigation?*

Citizenship, no criminal record, no major debts.

*What are the minimum standards for the physical fitness of candidates?*

Standard Bundeswehr PFT (including swimming).

*What personal qualities are assessed during screening/pre-selection?*

Comprehensive testing.

## **SELECTION**

*What is the unit/cadre that runs the selection course?*

Permanent unit conducts the selection and the two years of training.

*How are the cadre for the selection course chosen? What experience do they have, or what training do they receive to conduct selection?*

Experienced Commando NCOs and officers who have previously served in the units.

*What are the standards for successful selection?*

Rigorous standard—no exceptions.

*What is the selection process?*

Two ways to apply for admission as a trooper: Active soldier in the German Armed Forces; Civil applicant at the Training Center Special Operations in Pfullendorf.

*Selection (twice a year) has three parts:*

- General selection (PFT, CAT, ...) one week
- Hell week
- Test especially for officers directly after the hell week (weekend)
- Applicants undergo parts 1 and 2, officers undergo a part 3
- Applicants run through a ten-week program in preparation for part 2

## **POST-SELECTION**

*Once personnel are selected, do they directly join the unit, or do they take further training?*

Two-year training to become FOC.

*How long are selected personnel required to serve in the unit?*

After the two-year training to become FOC, six more years.

*How long are selected personnel allowed to serve in the unit?*

No restrictions as long as they meet the requirements. No rotation plan.

*While serving in the unit, are personnel periodically re-assessed?*

Reassessment periodically (medical fitness, physical fitness, skills).

*How are non-selected personnel managed? (For example: returned to original unit; assigned to a new unit; trained for another selection attempt; etc.)*

They return to the original unit, if allowed they can come back for a second attempt.

## **APPENDIX E. INTERVIEW WITH LTC CORSTIANUS DE LANGE AND MAJ BERNARDUS HASPELS**

### **GENERAL**

*What is the nationality and designation/name of the unit?*

Netherlands/Dutch Army SOF: Korps Commandotroepen.

*Is the unit considered or designated a “special operations” unit?*

Yes.

*What are the missions of the unit?*

Mission: The Korps Commandotroepen is immediately deployable for Special Operations anywhere in the world.

Main Tasks:

1. Special Reconnaissance—Area Reconnaissance (long range); Target Reconnaissance; Threat Analysis; Battle Damage Assessment;
2. Military Assistance: Providing assistance to foreign military units; Instruction and training of security forces; Advising leadership; Conducting joint operations;
3. Direct Action: Raid, ambushes, direct attack, counterterrorism; Target designation for precision-guided weapons; Retrieve personnel or materiel from hostile territory; Hostage Release Operations; Non-combatant Evacuation Operations.

*What is the number and what are the various military specialties of the unit (ODA) members?*

Six to eight-member team with capability to build platoon size, including: Commander, Deputy, Signal, Medic, Weapons/Sniper, Demolition, and Driver.

*How are personnel recruited or assigned to be candidates for the unit?*

Applicant candidates are primarily recruited from within the Defense organization, but civilian candidates may also apply.

Exact number of personnel required unknown, but we always run short. In general, the number is hard to determine because interest for SOF and SOF employment is growing every year. Mission capability depends on prioritization.

Personnel are recruited from armed forces' units, but for the army, also from the "civilian market" as well. We hope to get 20 operators out of each course, but it happens that only seven finish selection and advanced training.

*Does the unit have a selection process for its recruited or assigned personnel?*

Yes. After applying the candidates go through an extensive assessment and selection. Both units have a dedicated selection process for their operators but not for assigned personnel.

## **SCREENING/PRE-SELECTION**

*What categories of candidates are considered for selection to the unit?*

All candidates are welcomed. It is not mentioned specifically, but as far as I know women are also welcome. We take under consideration only voluntary types of candidates.

*If women are considered for selection to the unit, for what positions?*

If they meet the requirements of the job they can be employed in all positions. Currently, no woman has ever made it through the Initial Commando Course.

*Are there any differences in screening and selection requirements for any categories of candidates?*

No differences in screening but NCOs and Officers have to perform more leadership tasks.

In general, there are no differences. However, a leader will also lead throughout the selection/training. This will toughen their selection and training. Moreover, their screening will also be based on the fact that they are and will become leaders within the Dutch Army SOF.

*What are the entry-level requirements for candidates?*

- Dutch nationality and a valid proof of identity;
- Minimum an MBO-2 diploma (technical education level (higher than regular army)).
- Between 19.5 and 28.5 years old at the time of participation as a civilian candidate in the introductory days (a maximum of 28 years upon appointment).

Source: <https://www2.werkenbijdefensie.nl/commandoworden/>

Standard entry-level requirements: Netherlands citizenship, no criminal record, medical qualification for airborne duty, no younger than 19 at the start of selection and no older than 27 years (for selection as operator).

*What is assessed in the entry-level medical/physical examination? What are the minimum standards?*

The candidates need to be healthy in body and mind. Everyone applying for a military position goes through a selection and approval process. Only if you complete all components positively can you actually start working for the Ministry of Defense.

You are at least 1.65 meters tall and weigh at least 65 kilos (and are not overweight).

The selection and inspection is carried out for all parts of the armed forces at the navy barracks in Amsterdam. The procedure is step-by-step, which means that you will only be invited for a subsequent investigation if the previous investigation (administrative/counterintelligence and security) has been successfully completed. During the procedure, a psychological examination and a physical examination (medical examination and sports test) are performed. This is followed by a mandatory safety investigation.

– Good eye sight – do not wear glasses, contact lenses. Good dental health – not loose dental prosthesis. Good hearing. Good biometry. Good lung function.

Some diseases lead or can lead to disapproval, such as diabetes and epilepsy. Medication use can also be a reason for rejection.

Sources: <https://www2.werkenbijdefensie.nl/commandoworden/>  
<https://www2.werkenbijdefensie.nl/selectie-en-keuring/#screening>

*What are the requirements for military volunteers?*

You are willing to be sent on missions (expeditionary). For military personnel a maximum duration in rank applies (corporal at the KCT maximum 12 years). Therefore, individual assessments will be made.

*What is considered in the background investigation?*

Investigation/Screening Military Intelligence and Security Service (MISS).

All the things mentioned by you in the question will be examined through an administrative screening and a screening by the MISS.

Candidates with a conviction in which a sentence of more than 6 months has been imposed and the conviction is less than 8 years ago, have no chance to go through the inspection process positively.

Source: <https://www2.werkenbijdefensie.nl/over-defensie/toelatingseisen-en-keuring/>



All candidates are investigated by the Intelligence service and after selection have to be able to obtain a NATO Top Secret clearance.

*What are the minimum standards for the physical fitness of candidates?*

The minimum standards for physical fitness test that each candidate has to pass through include:

- Push-up: minimum 30 times in two minutes (without rest/pause)
- Running: minimum 2,800 meters in 12 minutes
- Sit ups: 40 times in two minutes (without rest/pause)
- Straight Pull-ups (Chinning): minimum six well executed
- Swimming tests: with and without clothes/weapon.

You have no fear of heights and you can swim well.

All candidates have to be able to swim 50 m, perform 40 push-ups and ten pull-ups (in under two minutes) and run 2,800 m in Cooper test (12 minute run) in order to start selection process.

*What personal qualities are assessed during screening/pre-selection?*

I could not find a list with personal qualities. Personnel applying for a job within the Dutch Army SOF regiments do have to live up to the core values of our regiment: Courage; Loyalty; Policy; Pride; Honor;

All mentioned above. Now the screening is multidisciplinary. Hence the screening is administered by a board of specialists, i.e., psychologist, sociologists, doctor, etc.

## **SELECTION**

*What is the unit/cadre that runs the selection course?*

In general, function/job duration within the Dutch Army is two to three years. After this period, personnel will apply for another job within the Defense organization. The team that is permanently responsible for selection and training is in that sense temporary (people come in and leave every two to three years).

When necessary, the primary selection and training team can be supported by temporary personnel from the operational companies for a short period of time.

*How are the cadre for the selection course chosen?*

They are selected based on experience, character traits, and the required skills necessary to successfully execute the job. Per case, if extra training and education is needed, training and education can be provided during the function duration.

The unit's training branch consists of operators with several years of experience in the unit and operations. Instructors follow an instructor course for proper education on instruction.

*What are the standards for successful selection?*

In our system the standards/requirements are fixed. They do not fluctuate based on quotas. Adjusting standards is on our opinion adjusting the quality of our unit. Quality is more important than quantity. Our mission and core values make us who we are. We will not adjust who we are and should be for contemporary quotas.

Standards are fixed but evaluated at regular intervals. More selection criteria have been added over the years and getting through selection has not become easier but rather more difficult. Because standards have been maintained the personnel requirement has never been at 100%.

*What is the selection process?*

Three days—Introduction Days. The aims are: 1) the candidate is to get a realistic idea of the training program and what means to be SF commando; 2) the candidates are tested extensively for physical and mental fitness by physiologists and psychologists. Civilians stay a fourth day for extra psychological assessment.

Seventeen weeks—General Airmobile Military Training. After their physical and psychological assessment civilian candidates must complete General Airmobile Military Training.

Eight weeks—Introductory Training. During that phase the candidates develop the basic military skills and are given an extensive physical training program to prepare them for the Initial Commando Course.

Eight weeks—Initial Commando Course. During that phase the instruction team assesses whether the candidate has what it takes to be a commando. The candidate gets little rest and has to push himself to the limit, both physically and mentally. Despite these difficult conditions, the candidate is expected to meet the toughest requirements during the program. This reaches its pinnacle in the last obstacle of the program, "the exhaustion." After completing the Initial Commando Course, the candidates receive a green beret and from then on he is a certified commando.

The number of candidates varies, so it is impossible to provide a fixed number. Based on the regiment's need and the amount of people applying for a job within the Army SOF regiments, courses are being given once or twice a year.

There is a two day pre-selection for the Army SOF followed by a four-week preparation course, an eight-week Elementary Commando Course (ECO), and a 12-month Advanced Commando Course (VCO) before they are integrated in an existing SOF Coy.

## **POST-SELECTION**

*Once personnel are selected, do they directly join the unit, or do they take further training?*

The Initial Commando Course is followed by a 45-week Advanced Commando Course, where the commando pushes his boundaries, learns special skills, and performs under great pressure. The program is divided into modules, such as:

- basic military free-fall course;
- operations in mountainous terrain;
- operations in areas abundant in water;
- Special Operations in urban areas;
- vehicle operations;
- special shooting training;
- helicopter operations;
- Combat Life Saver.

The longest module in the training program is one of the specializations: Demolition, Communications, Sniper, or Medic.

After completing all modules, the candidate has become a Special Operations Commando and joins one of the operational companies.

After pre-selection in many cases, selected candidates have to wait for access to the selection and advanced training course, which is only twice a year for the Army SOF.

*How long are selected personnel required to serve in the unit?*

After completing military training, the selected personnel are required to serve in the unit for two years.

Source: <https://www.korpscommandotroepen.nl/werving/loopbaan-kct/>

*How long are selected personnel allowed to serve in the unit?*

Duration to serve depends on the rank of the person. We call that the duration in rank. After three years—or earlier—an assessment will be made as to whether growth and promotion to a higher rank (non-commissioned officer or officer) is possible (provided you have successfully completed the prior education required for that position). If growth is not possible, after 12 years at the latest you will be mediated for a job in civil society.

Source: <https://www.korpscommandotroepen.nl/werving/loopbaan-kct/>

No limit to years serving in the unit for NCOs. Officers have to fulfill some joint or staff positions in order to advance in rank. SNCOs in order to advance to the highest level also need some joint billets with army or navy.

*While serving in the unit, are personnel periodically re-assessed?*

In general, the function duration is two to three years. During these periods, personnel are continuously assessed, and conversations take place between leaders and their subordinates to maintain or improve performance (on both sides). If a person does not fit into the team, does not have the right qualities/capabilities, his personal life no longer matches his professional life, etc., his contract will not be extended and he will leave the unit.

Without consensus between employee and employer, dismissal only occurs after an intensive period of professional guidance related to the person's performance and a final evaluation based on clear competencies/capabilities (validated by the Defense organization) that clearly show and explain how the person failed to perform related to what is expected from him/her. The two-level up commander is also involved in this process to mentor the process and make sure that everything is executed in conformance with regulations.

Personnel are assessed in annual manner. Only dismissed if performance is unsatisfactory.

*How are non-selected personnel managed?*

There is an arrangement that military personnel who do not successfully complete the selection/training can return to their old units. In some cases, personnel are offered a non-batched job within the SOF regiment (e.g., logistics).

Civilians will return to civilian society or, if they want to, be re-assigned to another conventional unit (e.g., the Air Assault Brigade).

Non-selected personnel are returned to the unit or their previous assignment (i.e., civilian candidates).

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## **APPENDIX F. INTERVIEW WITH SENIOR NORNAVSOC REPRESENTATIVE (ANONYMOUS)**

### **GENERAL**

This survey focuses on the Marinejegers in Marinejegerkommandoen (MJK), also called Norwegian Naval Special Operations Commandos (NORNAVSOC). The unit also selects and trains its own boat crew, similar to the U.S. Navy's *Special Warfare Combatant Craft Crewmen* (SWCC), Special Boat Operators (SBO).

*What is the nationality and designation/name of the unit?*

NORWAY, Marinejegerkommandoen (MJK), Norwegian Naval Special Operations Commandos (NORNAVSOC)

*Is the unit considered or designated a “special operations” unit?*

Yes, together with Forsvarets spesialkommando (FSK) and 339 Special Operations Air Squadron (339 SOAS).

*What are the missions of the unit?*

(The missions are AJP-3.5 CHAPTER 2—ALLIED SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES PRINCIPAL TASKS only, or there are additional; for example: the unit can execute CT missions in the country, execute security operations of HVI, etc.). National CT, DA, MA, SR

*What is the number and what are the various military specialties of the unit (ODA) members?*

The unit size is considered classified information.

Regarding specialization, in general: medics, JTACs/communication, snipers, breachers, technical exploitation operations (TEO), UAV pilots, K9/dog handlers.

*How are personnel recruited or assigned to be candidates for the unit?*

Personnel are recruited through the internet, social media, stands, and through “national rumor [word-of-mouth]” (people have heard about the unit). Due to continuous deployments abroad, media articles about special operations have been known (for instance when a unit member was severely injured due to enemy fire during a *high profile*

*attack* in Kabul, or when members of the unit are awarded for meritorious service in combat actions.

No minimum requirement. We only have a minimum standard. We have had years where no one came through, and some years we have a larger group of people coming through (14+).

*Does the unit have a selection process for its recruited or assigned personnel?*

Yes. The selection process lasts one year in total; however, the process divides into different phases, where different skillsets, capabilities, and motivation are tested.

## **SCREENING/PRE-SELECTION**

*What categories of candidates are considered for selection to the unit?*

All Norwegian citizens who do not have a criminal record and are medically fit are allowed to apply for selection; we do not separate men or women when selecting future operators.

*If women are considered for selection to the unit, for what positions?*

The Norwegian armed forces are in general gender neutral, which gives equal rights and opportunities regardless the genders. When it comes to NORFOT, this means that both men and women are allowed to apply for selection. They face the same standards. Per now, no woman has made it through the first five weeks.

The Marinejegerkommandoen (NORNAVSO) has several females working in staff and support functions.

If the unit was allowed to increase its special operator manpower (which is restricted by a maximum number), female special operators would have been one of the most desired capabilities to take on—not necessarily as marinejegers (SEALs/frogmen) or SBOs, but rather within the domain of special reconnaissance and military assistance. This would require a different type of selection, based on the requirements needed in such roles, and would be the same for men and women. (This is based on previous project work done in the unit.)

*Are there any differences in screening and selection requirements for any categories of candidates?*

Based on the type of special operators we have, there are differences between them.

Marinejegers (frogmen/assaulters) have their own selection called “The Marinejeger Course.”

Special Boat Operators have their own selection, called “The SBO Course.”

Assault IEDD operators (Mine divers/EOD experts from the Naval EOD Command (MDK)). These are regularly selected in small numbers from MDK, and are offered to go through essential parts of the Marinejeger Course (Rifle/pistol shooting, CQB selection, Ship Boarding Course, etc.). After completion of selection/course, they are implemented in the assault teams like marinejegers, but specialize in IEDD.

Within the abovementioned selections, no differences are made between the candidates, for instance: officers and enlisted; young and old; male and female; experienced and inexperienced. (However, we will always question what we’d expect from an experienced soldier/officer; for instance, we expect an infantry soldier to be fairly good at marksmanship from the beginning of the course.)

*What are the entry-level requirements for candidates?*

The Norwegian armed forces are based on a conscription system. This means in general; all Norwegians are told to serve for 12 months after high school, approximately at age 18–20 years old. To apply for SOF selection, one needs to have completed the conscription period (or the conscript period needs to be completed within the start of the course).

–No criminal record.

–Pass security clearance (minimum national SECRET).

*What is assessed in the entry-level medical/physical examination? What are the minimum standards?*

Medical: A complete check by a military physician (vision, audio, back, skeleton, skin, digestion, lungs, etc.). Glasses/contact lenses disqualify.

Intelligence: when serving in the Norwegian armed forces, one is tested on his or her mental abilities (several tests, including numbers, languages, logic, etc). When applying for SOF the minimum standard is set at average or higher.

*What are the requirements for military volunteers?*

Complete one year of military service before course commences.

*What is considered in the background investigation?*

–Norwegian citizenship

–Norwegian SECRET + NATO Secret clearance



*What are the minimum standards for the physical fitness of candidates?*

Physical:

- Pull-ups: 8
- Sit-ups/crunches from hanging upside down: 14
- Push-ups: 45
- 5,000-meter run: less than 25 minutes
- 15 km hike in terrain with 20 kg backpack with weapon in less than 2.5 hours
- 400meters swim: less than 10 minutes
- 25-meter sub-surface swim: pass/fail

*What personal qualities are assessed during screening/pre-selection?*

I could probably write several papers on this question. I will limit myself to saying: yes, all of the above, except leadership. MJK does not include leadership as something we assess during selection. It is considered a good quality; however, we do not disqualify any candidates for lack of leadership. Nor can I say we test patriotism in any measured tests or systematically address patriotism as a quality.

In general, I will say our selection validates team effort and team orientation before anything else. The ability to produce power, so the team's results increase, is mandatory for every candidate—always.

Another part I realize when talking to other NATO SOF personnel is that MJK highly values creativity, along with initiative. When starting the selection phase, we try to give the candidates as few rules as possible. The group of candidates has to sort out themselves how they do it. The instructors only provide the desired end-state. And from that point on, the candidates have to do their own evaluation of how to get there. The point is to break down the “box” and mindset already put in their head and start always to think “how do I fix this fast, effectively and efficiently?” without instructors telling them the how. After I gained more experience talking to allied NATO SOF units, I believe this part is a bit unique to special operators in MJK.

A second part, which comes with creativity, is risk assessment. When starting selection in MJK, you are told that “everything is allowed until you get caught. But if you get caught, you have to pay for it.” What we are trying to achieve with this is the candidates always to speculate and evaluate how to improve one's own situation and desire a better outcome. In other words, always do risk assessment (risk vs. gain). Very often this part is misunderstood as “cheating” for personnel observing from the outside, and we are asked “why do you want cheaters?” The thing is that initially, during the selection phase, there is no room for cheating. The process is so “simple” and so monitored that one cannot get away from the instructors' observations during tests/events which are essential. Eventually, the candidates understand what we want, and the desired effects are achieved.

## SELECTION

*What is the unit/cadre that runs the selection course?*

Only Marinejegers (operators) are allowed to take part in the selection process of marinejeger candidates. It is a rotation system; operators from the assault squadrons rotate into the training wing to be instructors as a part of their career development. After some years they rotate back.

*How are the cadre for the selection course chosen?*

- Been through the selection process personally
- Operational experience
- Learning from the senior instructors the first year(s)
- Following the Selection Manual

*What are the standards for successful selection?*

The standards are fixed in the way they are equal each year, where the candidates have to pass each part of the selection. However, subjective considerations from the cadre are always part of the process.

*What is the selection process?*

Pre-phase: get invited to start the selection (which means having fulfilled the requirements in question 11)

Phase 1, screening: three to four days of physical testing, interview, medical test, ability tests

Phase 2: Isolation phase/Negative selection—Darwin phase; survival of the fittest: get rid of the ones who do not want to be there by imposing different types of physical and mental stress on the candidates. Usually, most candidates leave voluntarily. This phase's goal is to bring the group from large to manageable in numbers (we believe you cannot teach military skills with a desired quality before the groups are within a reachable size (so there is no room to hide in the group). Typically less than 15 candidates, but no standards are set. This phase lasts four to five weeks.

Phase 3: positive selection: the candidates engage in the Marinejeger pipeline (the Marinejeger course), which lasts approximately one year. By positive selection, it means that the candidates are exposed to tests and qualify for further training by passing each test. The positive selection phase separates into field training, CQB training, winter training (field training during winter circumstances), and dive school.

We do not have any set numbers of candidates.

## POST-SELECTION

*Once personnel are selected, do they directly join the unit, or do they take further training?*

The new operators start training along with the experienced operators. The first year after selection is considered a “try-out” period, which means the new operator receives a one-year contract, where he is considered as a team member who brings something to the table or not by the current operators and the platoon leaders. They may be deployed for operations (e.g., military assistance/counterterrorist operations in Afghanistan) during this year.

*How long are selected personnel required to serve in the unit?*

The unit issues two types of contracts:

T35: which means you are allowed to serve until one reach 35 years old. This may be expanded up to the age of 38.

T60: if considered in possession of valuable knowledge one is given a new contract until retirement (60 years old).

No one is required to serve; if one operator wants to quit, he is allowed to leave whenever he wants (there is a three months end-of-contract period). The unit is not interested in having demotivated personnel within its ranks.

*How long are selected personnel allowed to serve in the unit?*

See question 21. When given either T35 or T60, one can always apply for other positions within the armed forces if desired. Or, you can stay in the unit. Officers are ordered out of the unit to headquarters and joint service to expand one’s knowledge and career opportunities.

*While serving in the unit, are personnel periodically re-assessed?*

- Annual PT tests
- Annual performance review (written statement by the officer in charge)
- Various operator tests

Reasons for discharge: Loss of security clearance, criminality, DUI, unprofessional behavior (subjective evaluation)

*How are non-selected personnel managed?*

If dropped from selection a candidate is dismissed, and the unit is no longer accountable for the candidate.

If the instructors find the candidate promising, he/she is allowed to return next year.

## **APPENDIX G. INTERVIEW WITH COL JAROSLAW JABLONSKI**

### **GENERAL**

*What is the nationality and designation/name of the unit?*

Polish Special Mission Unit GROM

*Is the unit considered or designated a “special operations” unit?*

Designated

*What are the missions of the unit?*

(The missions are AJP-3.5 CHAPTER 2—ALLIED SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES PRINCIPAL TASKS only, or there are additional tasks; for example: the unit can execute CT missions in the country, execute security operations of HVI, etc.). DA, HRO, SR and MA.

*What is the number and what are the various military specialties of the unit (ODA) members?*

Six-member team w/capability to build ODA from eight to 12 members. Commander, Deputy, signal, medic, weapon/EOD SME, driver.

*How are personnel recruited or assigned to be candidates for the unit?*

Personnel are recruited from armed forces' units and law enforcement units but also from the “civilian market” as well.

*Does the unit have a selection process for its recruited or assigned personnel?*

Unit has dedicated selection process, which consists of two pipelines: the selection to the squadrons (operators), and qualification for the rest of the military specialties of the unit. It is only a small difference between selection and qualification programs during the mountaineering phase.

## SCREENING/PRE-SELECTION

*What categories of candidates are considered for selection to the unit?*

We take under consideration all type candidates.

*If women are considered for selection to the unit, for what positions?*

Yes.

*Are there any differences in screening and selection requirements for any categories of candidates?*

All candidates are taken under the screening process.

*What are the entry-level requirements for candidates?*

Standard entry-level requirements: Polish citizenship, no criminal record, medical qualification to airborne units, knowledge of a foreign language, no older than 30 years (for selection as operator).

*What is assessed in the entry-level medical/physical examination?*

Medical entry-level: pass the medical exam to the airborne units.

*What are the requirements for military volunteers?*

The longer the experience and the more abundant the CV of a candidate, the better.

*What is considered in the background investigation?*

All candidates are investigated by COIN service and after selection have to take NATO TOP Secret Clearance.

*What are the minimum standards for the physical fitness of candidates?*

All candidates have to swim, do push-ups and pull-ups as many—as possible (the more the better IOT makes chance to qualify)

*What personal qualities are assessed during screening/pre-selection?*

All mentioned above. Now the screening is multidisciplinary. Hence the screening is taken by a board of specialists (i.e., psychologists, sociologists, etc.)

## SELECTION

*What is the unit/cadre that runs the selection course?*

Permanent / dedicated cadre from unit's training branch.

*How are the cadre for the selection course chosen?*

The unit's training branch was built by former operators with combat experience.

*What are the standards for successful selection?*

From the last 28 years the unit did not lower the selection standard. In some areas like in the psychological screening—as part of pre-selection—we increased our standards.

*What is the selection process?*

The selection consists of three phases: phase one is 72 hours—physical and psychological selection (with limited sleep, including elements of urban climbing). Right after that is 12 to 15 months of the basic course for operators and four months for non-operators.

## POST-SELECTION

*Once personnel are selected, do they directly join the unit, or do they take further training?*

In many cases, selected candidates have to wait for access to the unit because of the lack of empty position in accordance with the military rang and specialties.

*How long are selected personnel required to serve in the unit?*

No such requirement.

*How long are selected personnel allowed to serve in the unit? Is there a rotation plan to return unit personnel to the regular armed forces, and then back to the unit?*

No limit with the serve in the unit.

*While serving in the unit, are personnel periodically re-assessed?*

Personnel are assessed on an annual basis.

*How are non-selected personnel managed?*

Non-selected personnel are returned to the unit or their previous assignment (i.e., civilian candidates).

## **APPENDIX H. INTERVIEW WITH DANIEL GAVRA OF5, ROU SOF**

### **GENERAL**

*What is the nationality and designation/name of the unit?*

1÷Romanian Commandos, 2÷Romanian Special Forces units

*Is the unit considered or designated a “special operations” unit?*

1–Designated, 2–designated

*What are the missions of the unit?*

1–DA, SR; 2–MA, and SR and DA

*What is the number and what are the various military specialties of the unit (ODA) members?*

Nine to 12, revolving around the U.S. 12-man ODA.

*How are personnel recruited or assigned to be candidates for the unit?*

Recruited from the military, and also civilians. We aim to get 50–60 new personnel every year.

*Does the unit have a selection process for its recruited or assigned personnel?*

Yes. The selection process is managed by the school.

### **SCREENING/PRE-SELECTION**

*What categories of candidates are considered for selection to the unit?*

Officers, NCOs, enlisted, and civilians.

*If women are considered for selection to the unit, for what positions?*

Yes, for all units. All positions, too. The law forbids us to restrict women from attending any position in the military.



*Are there any differences in screening and selection requirements for any categories of candidates?*

So far, it is the same selection standards for everybody.

*What are the entry-level requirements for candidates?*

1. For Romanian Commandos: 18–42 years old, 10 grades, minimum English comprehension.
2. For Romanian Special Forces units: 18–42 years of age, high school graduates, minimum English comprehension.

*What is assessed in the entry-level medical/physical examination? What are the minimum standards?*

Airborne medical standard.

*What are the requirements for military volunteers?*

We only expect them to express the will to join.

*What is considered in the background investigation?*

Legal records.

*What are the minimum standards for the physical fitness of candidates?*

Minimum airborne standards for the group 32–38 years old. Fear of heights, water, darkness, confined spaces represent a no-go.

*What personal qualities are assessed during screening/pre-selection?*

Personality profile, creativity, motivation, integrity, determination, loyalty, team player, motivation.

## **SELECTION**

*What is the unit/cadre that runs the selection course?*

A permanent cadre core, augmented with temporary cadres. (Working hard to get there, though.)

*How are the cadre for the selection course chosen?*

School has a specially designated company to run selection. Cadres are veterans from the other SOF units, serving their time in the school.

*What are the standards for successful selection?*

The standards are fixed. However, on a case by case situation, a board can waive some standards for specific candidates.

*What is the selection process?*

Three phases: individual, land navigation, team events, all together in 17 days. One course per year, maximum 300 candidates (the last few years we had maximum 170 at the gate).

## **POST-SELECTION**

*Once personnel are selected, do they directly join the unit, or do they take further training?*

After selection, they go straight to training in the school.

*How long are selected personnel required to serve in the unit?*

Ideally 10 years, but anyone can quit sooner, based on personal option.

We try to keep them on non-SOF positions and have them trained for the next selection. No maximum number of selection attempts is in place.

*How long are selected personnel allowed to serve in the unit?*

Operators can stay in the unit as long as they meet the standards. Bluntly put, they can stay until retirement, if they can handle it. It's up to them.

*While serving in the unit, are personnel periodically re-assessed?*

Yearly reassessed. No involuntarily reassigned or dismissed so far.

*How are non-selected personnel managed?*

N/A; answer not provided.

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